

A global Roundabout

Entangled im/mobilities of ir/regular labour migrants and agricultural products in Almería's greenhouse production



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Abstract

In contemporary global value chains, flows of mobilities of people and products continuously criss-cross one another. Engaging with the 'mobilities turn' and networked conceptualisations of value chains, this research empirically unpacks the entanglements of im/mobilities of ir/regular labour migrants and agricultural products in Almería's (Spain) agricultural industry. In doing so, it emphasises how interdependent im/mobilities in globalised production are shaped by regulatory infrastructures of control and in/formal migration industries. This tension field between mobility-facilitation and obstruction results in a constant dialectic between regimes of control and the autonomy of migration. To gain empirical insights into individual experiences of above-mentioned macrostructures, I have conducted qualitative research among various actors involved in Almería's agricultural industry. I link up the empirical findings and theoretical debates on im/mobilities, value chains, ir/regularity and autonomy of migration in the conceptual model the 'global roundabout.' This analysis detects three layers of entanglement between labour and mobility in Almería's capitalised global production. I conclude that the three-layered entanglement excavates the intrinsic relation between capitalism and extractivism and thus the coloniality of Almería's capitalist value chain. This study therefore shows how an analytical focus on entanglements can deepen our understanding of the configurations and driving forces of global im/mobilities in postcolonial capitalism.

Keywords: Im/mobilities, value chains, entanglements, ir/regularity, autonomy of migration, postcolonial capitalism, agricultural labour mobility, migration industries, social navigation

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Glossary

“Abre la boca”	Literally translated as “to open your mouth.” Referring to the act of communicating needs and desires to others
“Buscar la vida”	Literally translated as ‘searching for a life’. However, it is often used as ‘to make a living’ or ‘move on in life’
Cortijo	Small cottage in the countryside. Many migrants working in greenhouses live in <i>cortijo’s</i> in the rural areas
Empadronamiento	Population registration of the municipality
Papeles	Literally translated as ‘papers.’ Colloquially referring to a Spanish residence permit
“Perder los papeles”	Spanish proverb that literally translates as “losing the papers” but figuratively means “to freak out or to lose oneself”
Pruebas	Evidence accrediting continuous residence in Spain
Semillero	A seed-growing centre where seeds are germinated to eventually be sold as plants
“Shouwia shouwia”	Arab proverb meaning ‘little by little’
SOC-SAT	Labour Union in Almería: <i>El Sindicato del Obreros del Campo y Sindicato Andaluz de Trabajadores</i>
“Todo es un negocio”	“Everything is a business” in Spanish



1. Introduction

1.1. Research problem

It is dark, but there is already a lot of movement on the roundabout *Hermanas del Niño Jesús* in El Ejido.¹ Vans, loaded with wheelbarrows, pass by, stop and continue their routes. The moment a van stops, people waiting on the sides of the roundabout approach it. Merely visible as shadows, persons get into the vans after which they proceed their ways towards Almería's greenhouses and distribution centres.

Ousmane, a middle-aged man from Senegal, sits at the edge of the roundabout. He waits for one of the farmers' vans to pick him up for a day's work. He does not have a legal status and can therefore only work informally. As the vans pass by on the roundabout, so does his hope for a job. The sun has already risen, he will not work today.

Sitting in her *cortijo*,² Basima, a Moroccan woman in her fifties, checks her phone for a response concerning the revision of her legal status. She has been waiting for this response for a long time, which makes her nervous. Because Basima is employed in a distribution centre, her labour contract might allow her regular status to be resumed. She has paid her employer a few thousand euros for this contract. However, as a labour contract promises regularity and therefore the prospect of a better life, it was her best option.

Standing in the heat of a greenhouse, Daniel, a young farmer running an agricultural business with his dad, explains why his employees need to pay him a big fee for a labour contract. Demonstrating the ins- and outs of industrial farming, he elaborates on the financial risks he must take

as a producer. Being part of Almería's extensive, globally embedded production chain, he is subject to the cost-cutting tendencies of capitalism. Therefore, he states, his costs for labour should be as low as possible.

José Manuel, a seed-grower from El Ejido, shows the halls where seeds are germinated to provide for Almería's farmers. Over the course of his multiple years of experience in agriculture, he has seen Almería's landscape and methods of production change. Referring to the current scale of Almería's agriculture, he states that migrant labour has become a strict necessity to keep the industry running and wonders how much more Almería's 'sea' of greenhouses will expand.

Spitou Mendy, a Senegalese activist who lives for over twenty years in Almería, oversees the 'Sea of Plastic' around his hometown. Doing this, he points out the construction of a neighbourhood of luxurious villas nearby. "Welcome to this system of inequality and suffering" he exclaims. He tells that under all these plastic roofs migrants are working in precarious conditions to generate wealth for the people in these villas. "We, the migrants, are the engines of Almería's countryside" he states.

Mohamed, a man from Mali, points out on google maps the various places he has worked over the years. He has been employed informally and formally, with and without legal status, in different jobs in Mali, Spain and France. By moving between locations and using his social contacts to find jobs and places to stay, he has enabled himself to make a living and send money to his family in Mali. Employment in agriculture has been a common thread in Mohamed's transnational wanderings.

¹ Area in the province of Almería with the highest concentration of greenhouses.

² Small cottage in the countryside. Many migrants working in greenhouses live in *cortijo's* in the rural areas.

As working in agriculture is a common thread in Mohamed's mobility trajectory, the lives of all these individuals revolve around Almería's agricultural industry. Almería is a province in the south of Spain and provides the countries' largest agricultural greenhouse production (Deutsche Welle, 2019; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; DePablo et al., 2020). Consequently, the region's landscape appears as a 'Plastic Sea' encompassing 31.000 hectares of greenhouses. Under these whitewashed roofs and in the plenty distribution centres and transport businesses work around 203.000 migrant labourers. This mobile workforce is fundamental to Almería's annual production of 3.5 million tons of crops (Rippingale, 2019; Deutsche Welle, 2019).

In distinct ways, the people introduced above are actors in the global production and distribution of agricultural products. They are part of Almería's 'global roundabout', a conceptual model that I will introduce in this research. Almería's 'global roundabout' conceptualises the mechanism that transnationally regulates the supply and demand of agricultural labour and products. Deriving from the 'mobilities paradigm' (Sheller & Urry, 2006, Cresswell, 2010; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013), this study takes mobility instead of sedentarism as point of departure. Therefore, the im/mobilities of people, products and capital that involve Almería's agricultural value chain, are the main entities of research. Lepawsky and Mather (2011) oppose static and linear notions of global value chains and argue that global production systems should rather be conceptualised as fluid and interrelated networks of actors. Engaging with both the 'mobilities turn' and networked conceptualisations of value chains, it is significant to research the relationality of im/mobilities of people, products and capital in global systems of production.

Almería's agricultural industry is globally embedded and integrated in extensive capitalist production networks. Therefore, this study aims to

examine the entanglements of im/mobilities of agricultural products and the im/mobilities of ir/regular labour migrants comprising Almería's agricultural production chain. In doing this, I empirically unpack how these interdependent im/mobilities are shaped by regulatory infrastructures of control and in/formal migration industries. By juxtaposing the im/mobilities of agricultural products and the im/mobilities of labour migrants, I highlight how the "slow and fast lanes of the globe" (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p.207) are institutionally produced. Situating this study in an era of postcolonial capitalism, I aim to articulate the politicised lines between those who reap the fruits in Almería's greenhouses and those who reap the fruits of its capitalised production. Analysing the Janus-faced nature of postcolonial capitalism, I aim to detect how the tension field between mobility- facilitation and obstruction causes a constant dialectic between infrastructures of control and infrastructures of autonomy.

To analyse how im/mobilities of people and products are shaped and how this is the cause and result of a continuous dialectic between infrastructures of control and of autonomy, I will bring forward the concepts 'ir/regularity' and the 'autonomy of migration.' Kubal (2013) and Samaddar (2018; 2021) argue that 'ir/regularity' is intentionally manufactured by labour- and mobility regimes to create an in/formal and 'transitory' migrant labour force. Ir/regularity is marked by precarity and in/formality and therefore reinforces migrants' vulnerability to structural exploitation. Driven by the cost-cutting tendencies of global capitalism, the structural exploitation of in/formal migrant labour has become the backbone of Almería's production chain. However, Kubal (2013), Mezzadra (2010) and Samaddar (2021) emphasise that it is too one-sided to portray ir/regularity as a mere state of victimhood and repression. Controlling labour migrants' im/mobilities inevitably goes hand in hand with migrants' collective efforts to challenge the regimes by means of in/formal 'migration

industries' (Schapendonk, 2018; Schapendonk, 2015). This collective counter movement can be conceptualised as the autonomy of migration (Mezzadra, 2011; Samaddar, 2021).

All in all, in the conceptual model of the 'global roundabout' I link up the theoretical debates on im/mobilities, value chains, ir/regularity and the autonomy of migration. This model will serve as a conceptual lens to analyse the empirical accounts from different actors in Almería's agricultural industry. I will investigate how Almería's agriculture is a 'common thread' for the im/mobilities of both agricultural products and labour migrants. Therefore, I will research the inherently entangled im/mobilities of Almería's 'global roundabout.'

1.2. Research objective and questions

This research aims to shed light on the entanglements of agricultural goods and migrant labour Almería's capitalised, global value chain. The three-layered objective for this research is to:

- 1) gain empirical insights into the entanglements of the im/mobilities of ir/regular labour migrants and the im/mobilities of agricultural products comprising Almería's agricultural production and 2) unpack how these interdependent im/mobilities are shaped by regulatory infrastructures of control and in/formal migration industries to 3) detect how the tension field between mobility-facilitation and obstruction causes a constant dialectic between regimes of control and the autonomy of migration. I will do this by conducting qualitative research among various actors involving Almería's agricultural industry.

To further operationalise this objective, I will use the following research question:

How do im/mobilities of ir/regular labour migrants, employed in Almería's agricultural industry, entangle with the im/mobilities of the agricultural goods they produce?

This question will serve as the theoretical lens of this research. To answer this question, it is divided into three complementary sub-questions. Together, these questions will provide a deeper understanding of the inherent entanglements of im/mobilities of people and products in contemporary capitalism.

1. How is migrant labour embedded in Almería's globalised agricultural industry?

By answering this question, I aim to empirically outline how in/formal migrant labour is inherent to the globalised and capitalist nature of Almería's agricultural industry. Doing so, I show how Almería's agricultural production comprises an interdependent network of global im/mobilities of people and products. Subsequently, I examine how postcolonial capitalist forces cause structural power imbalances within Almería's production chain and thereby produce an in/formal, flexible and cheap migrant labour force.

2. **How is ir/regularity produced by regimes of control?**

This question shows how labour migrants, by means of Almería's agricultural industry, move in- and out ir/regularity. It therefore exemplifies the ambiguity of ir/regularity and demonstrates the entanglements of labour- and mobility regimes. This will give qualitative insights into the im/mobilities and lived realities of individuals experiencing (the consequences of) Spanish-European infrastructures of control.

3. **How do regimes of control and infrastructures of autonomy interplay in labour migrants' mobility trajectories?**

Answering this question will exemplify the obstructions and facilitations that labour migrants encounter during their mobility trajectories. It will give insight into the different ways the controlling infrastructures of labour- and mobility regimes are challenged and circumvented by in/formal migration industries. Highlighting the other side of the coin of ir/regularity, I show how regulatory infrastructures are inevitably confronted with migrants' collective agency. By means of social negotiation, fluid and in/formal social networks emerge that facilitate alternative ways of mobilisation, and therefore reinforce the autonomy of migration.

1.3. Scientific Relevance

By researching the im/mobilities of Almería's agricultural products and the migrant workers that produce them, this study aims to further comprehend the entanglements of im/mobilities in an era of global, postcolonial capitalism. As demonstrated by an existing body of research (Cresswell, 2010; Glick & Salazar, 2013; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Lepawsky & Mather, 2011; Rye & Scott, 2018; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Law, 2004; Adey, 2006; Urry, 2003; Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006; De Haas, 2020; Samaddar, 2021), globalisation has resulted in the extension, acceleration and increased complexity of global mobility. Deriving from the 'mobilities turn' (Sheller & Urry, 2006, Cresswell, 2010; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013), this research aims to unravel and operationalise how globally embedded capitalist systems, like Almería's agricultural industry, consist of entangled meshworks of im/mobilities. Several mobility scholars (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Law, 2004; Cresswell, 2010, Adey, 2006) have emphasised the significance to examine the intrinsic interrelationality of im/mobilities of people, goods and capital. In Almería's agricultural value chain, this relationality is explicitly evident, as the im/mobilities of agricultural products are inherent to the im/mobilities of labour migrants that are at the backbone of the production, processing and distribution of these crops.

Applying the mobilities paradigm in the context of Almería's agricultural production moreover debunks static and linear conceptualisations of value chains. Lepawsky and Mather (2011) oppose unidirectional and fixed conceptualisations of global production systems and demonstrate how globally embedded value chains consist of fluid networks of actors and actions. I will further build on this theory by highlighting the mutual relationality between actors and different segments within Almería's value chain. Grounded in academic debates on

im/mobilities and value chains, I empirically unpack how these relationalities are established and change over time.

Both migrants' mobility trajectories (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Cross, 2013; Schapendonk, 2018; Schapendonk, 2020) and agricultural labour migration (Corrado, 2017; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Rye & Scott, 2018) are extensively studied strands of research. While engaging with both fields, this research aims to distinguish itself from previous studies by including multiple actors and segments of the value chain. Most studies conducted on Almería's agriculture revolve around migrant labour in greenhouses from a migrants' perspective. This study extends the scope of investigation by including empirical accounts of migrant labour in greenhouses, production plants, seed-distribution centres and transport. Beside the perspectives of migrants employed in these places, it also captures the perspectives of producers and other parties involved in the production, processing and distribution of agricultural commodities. Including a variety of perspectives helps to "identify synergies and frictions at play" (Schapendonk, 2018, p.676). Therefore, including the considerations and motivations of different actors within the chain helps to better comprehend the interdependencies and power dynamics between the segments.

Detecting the synergies and frictions at play in Almería's agricultural value chain shows structural power inequalities between the different segments. Large retailers reap the fruits of industrialisation while producers and migrant labourers carry the burdens of capitalism (Rye & Scott, 2018; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014). Within Almería's formal capitalist value chains, migrants have become postcolonial labouring subjects, marked by precarity, in/formality and ir/regularity (Samaddar, 2018; 2021). The interplay of Spanish restrictive

labour and mobility regimes produces ir/regularity which enables structural exploitation of migrant labour.

By investigating how these macrostructural configurations affect migrants' im/mobilities, this research links up the debates on mobile labour and ir/regularity. In doing this, I challenge the dichotomy between regularity and irregularity and show how the ambiguity of legal statuses produces zones of 'sub-existence' (Samaddar, 2018; 2021) or 'semi-legality' (Kubal, 2013). I empirically demonstrate how these zones are breeding grounds for an extensive mobile migrant labour force, conceptualised by Samaddar (2018; 2021) as 'transit labour'. Operationalising the concept of 'transit labour', this research investigates the two sides of the coin of this phenomenon: on the one hand, the consequent exploitation of 'transit labourers' in formal capitalist industries. On the other hand, it showcases how these zones of in/formality and ir/regularity are the potential for the emergence of in/formal migration industries, alternative ways of mobilisation and therefore the 'autonomy of migration' (Mezzadra, 2010; Samaddar, 2021).

By researching these 'two sides of the coin', I illustrate the dialectics between regimes that control migrants im/mobilities and the autonomy of migration. By unfolding individual migrant trajectories, this research demonstrates how migrants' collective and networked efforts challenge infrastructures of control. By means of in/formal migration industries, migrants collectively circumvent the grids of control and therefore regain autonomy over their movements. Aligning with fluid and networked conceptualisations of migration industries (Schapendonk, 2018; Ingold, 2011; Cranston et al., 2018), I unpack how networks are established and used to socially navigate labour and mobility regimes (Vigh, 2009; Schapendonk, 2015). Juxtaposing migrants' mobility trajectories, shaped by ir/regularity and migration industries, to the hyper mobilisation of

agricultural crops highlights the “slow and fast lanes” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p.207) of Almería’s capitalised agriculture. The inherent relationality of these ‘lanes’ underlines the entanglements of im/mobilities of people and goods and exposes the coloniality of the capitalist system. Linking up the debates on im/mobilities, value chains, ir/regularity and the autonomy of migration in the conceptual model of ‘the global roundabout’ therefore contributes to further analyse the political character of im/mobilities in an era of postcolonial capitalism.

1.4. Societal Relevance

In March 2017, seventy agricultural employer associations sent a letter to President Trump in reaction to a more restrictive immigration reform.³ As the legislative changes of this reform would limit the United States’ influx of labour migrants, agricultural industries foresaw major complications for their businesses. In their letter, the farmers ask the president to “maintain [their] access to the current workforce” (Agricultural Workforce Coalition, 2017) and acknowledge that “many farmworkers are undocumented migrants and cannot easily be replaced” (Farmworker Justice, 2017). Besides, they state that “an enforcement-only approach to immigration would be devastating to farmers and the agricultural economy” (Agricultural Workforce Coalition, 2017). The growers’ letter does not request undocumented labour migrants to be granted the opportunity to regularise. Rather, it appeals for a policy that “allows for work authorization for experienced agricultural workers” (Agricultural Workforce Coalition, 2017). Therefore, the farmers demand a legislation that ‘makes available’ a migrant labour force that is not regularised but is still authorised to work

in the agricultural industries. If not, it would be “devastating to farmers and the agricultural economy.”

This case of United states’ agriculture underlines the necessity to research the relation between labour and mobility in a context of capitalised and globalised agricultural production. The production and global distribution of food is essential to the nutrition of the world population. With a vastly increasing number of people on the globe, the industrialisation of food production has become self-evident. In addition, as exemplified by the farmers’ letter, agricultural industries are frequently significant to the economy of regions and countries. However, the contemporary configurations of global and capitalised agricultural industries are inherent to power imbalances and systems of structural exploitation (Samaddar, 2021). Taking into account 1) the fundamental role of food production for a growing world population and 2) the dehumanising conditions by which our current food production system is organised, it is highly relevant to examine the entanglements of these two dynamics. The case of the U.S.’ immigration reform highlights the tension field between the capitalist demand for migrant workers in agricultural industries, and increasingly restrictive migration policies. In this study, I empirically research the effects of labour and mobility regulations on migrants’ lived realities to give a human face to mechanisms of in- and exclusion. I will unpack how these regimes produce ir/regularity which is, as illustrated by the request of the U.S. farmers, beneficial to the functioning of agricultural industries.

With ethnographic accounts, I aim to unravel how these regimes hinder some im/mobilities while facilitating others. Juxtaposing the im/mobilities of agricultural goods and the people that produce them gives

³ The H-2A agricultural guestworker program

an insight in the unequal distribution of mobility, resonating with the division of power and wealth. Disentangling the relational character of global im/mobilities of people, products and capital in Almería's value chain therefore shows the inherent political character of mobility. Contextualising these tendencies in an era of postcolonial capitalism will help to further detect the coloniality of contemporary systems of production. Further consciousness and attention on the coloniality of global food production is needed in order to deconstruct the racial lines of contemporary capitalism.

1.5. What to expect: organisation of the thesis

In this section I will briefly outline how this thesis is organised.

In **chapter 1**, I have introduced the research problem and its significance to both the scientific and societal realm.

Subsequently, in **chapter 2**, I will engage with academic debates on im/mobilities, value chains, ir/regularity and the autonomy of migration. I link up these debates in the conceptual model of the 'global roundabout' that will serve as a theoretical lens to further analyse entangled im/mobilities in networked value chains.

Chapter 3 further delves into the research context of Almería's agriculture and elaborates on the applied qualitative methods. I thereby discuss the implementation of these methods and critically reflect on ethics, language and my positionality as a researcher in the ethnographic field.

Chapter 4, 5 and 6 are empirical chapters in which I present the findings of this qualitative research. In **chapter 4**, I critically examine how migrant labour is embedded in Almería's globalised, capitalised and

networked agricultural industry. I demonstrate how postcolonial capitalist forces cause structural power imbalances within Almería's production chain and thereby produce in/formal and transitory migrant labour.

Chapter 5 brings to the surface the ambiguous character of ir/regularity and shows how ir/regularity is intentionally produced by labour- and mobility regimes and reinforces structural exploitation of labour migrants. Giving qualitative accounts of individuals' im/mobilities and employment experiences revolving around Almería's agriculture, it excavates the inherent (regulatory) entanglements of labour and mobility.

In **chapter 6**, I will display the obstructions and facilitations that migrants encounter during their mobility trajectories and consequently distil how infrastructures of control and autonomy interplay. I describe how, by means of social negotiation, fluid and in/formal migration industries emerge that facilitate alternative ways of mobilisation, and consequently reinforce the autonomy of migration.

Chapter 7 concludes by bringing the empirical findings and theoretical debates together in referring to the 'global roundabout.' I show how the involvement of migrant labour in Almería's agricultural industry encompasses three interlinked layers of entanglement. These multi-dimensional entanglements expose the inherent political character of global mobility and the deeply ingrained colonial relation between capitalism and extractivism.

RESISTENCIA INTERMEDIA
IR:ToBRFV
VIRUS RUGOSO



BASF
We create chemistry

nunhems

El gran Azovian ^{F1}

TYLCV, TSWV y Nematodos

2. Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I will position the case of labour mobility in Almería's agriculture in a broader theoretical context. I discuss relevant academic debates on the concepts im/mobilities, value chains, ir/regularity and autonomy of migration and conjunct this theoretical outline in the conceptual model of the 'global roundabout.' This model serves as a conceptual lens to further analyse entangled im/mobilities of people and goods in global and capitalist value networks.

2.1. Entangled im/mobilities

Deriving from 'the mobilities turn' in social sciences, the concept 'mobilities' sheds new light on the analysis and conceptualisation of the global movement of people, capital and objects (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). Instead of taking 'sedentarism' as point of departure, and thus study mobility as a straight line between fixed locations, the new mobilities paradigm emphasises mobility trajectories and the different meanings these entail (Cresswell, 2010; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Focusing on how the trajectories of goods and people evolve and entangle, debunks static notions of migration. Moreover, it enhances insights into how mobility trajectories are "produced, facilitated, slowed down and blocked" (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014, p.263).

In current mobility research, the relational character of mobilities is frequently emphasised which leads to the necessity to examine mobilities in their interconnectedness (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Law, 2004; Cresswell, 2010, Adey, 2006). Therefore, researching the intersections of the im/mobilities of Almería's agricultural goods and the people who

produce them is particularly interesting. Both flows of mobility are driven by an increasingly globalised, cost-cutting capitalist system and fundamentally require each other's involvement (Gertel & Sippel, 2014). However, despite the mutual dependencies of these mobilities, the ways in which they are facilitated and obstructed are noticeably distinct (Gertel & Sippel, 2014).

This results in complex dynamics of mobility and immobility. Multiple scholars argue that mobility and immobility should not be theorised as two separate opposites, but moreover as intertwined forces that mutually influence each other (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010; Adey, 2006). This relationality is firstly demonstrated in the dialectic character of movement and fixity. Urry (2003) argues how complex mobility systems exist by the grace of so-called infrastructural moorings. These moorings function as nodes of immobility that facilitate mobile flows. In the context of Almería's agricultural production, the different segments along the value chain in which labour migrants are employed, can be conceptualised as infrastructural moorings. Researching how these places of stasis facilitate im/mobilities of both migrant workers and agricultural goods therefore provides deeper insights in the relational character of im/mobility.

Secondly, the facilitations and obstructions of im/mobilities of people and products are intrinsically related. Cresswell (2010, p.22) states that mobility is "one of the major resources of the 21st century", of which its unequal distribution causes stark contrasts in global wealth. Sheller & Urry (2006, p.207) refer to this uneven dispersion as "the slow and fast lanes of the globe" in which mobility of some people and goods is inherent to the immobility of others. This is demonstrated by the increasingly restrictive European migration policies that fortify the European Union's (EU) external borders for people originating outside the EU (Van Houtum,

2010). Meanwhile, the same apparatus of European policies facilitates global mobility of goods and capital (Gertel & Sippel, 2014) and enhances the free movement of EU citizens (Van Houtum, 2010).

Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) conceptualise the relationship between the unobstructed movements of the 'the fast lanes of the globe' and the restricted mobilities of the 'slow lanes' as 'regimes of mobility'. In this context, 'regime' refers to both the structuring role of individual states and of (supra-)national policies that affect im/mobilities of people, goods and capital (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). Accordingly, the contingent relation of im/mobility is inherently political, as the access to this resource involves questions of privilege, power and justice (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014).

2.2. Mobilising value chains

The distribution of mobility and thus privilege, power and justice resonates in how im/mobilities of people, goods and people are regulated and entangled (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). As globalisation went hand in hand with the emergence of capitalist production, commodification and distribution of goods, regimes of mobility affect how global production chains are configured (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). Analysing value chains from the 'mobilities turn' paradigm, demonstrates how global production networks exist by the grace of worldwide interconnected flows of mobility. This aligns with the thesis of Lepawsky and Mather (2011), who oppose unilinear and static conceptualisations of value chains. Concluding from their research on worldwide trajectories and circulations of electronic waste, they instead propagate an analysis of contemporary global production structures as fluid, interrelated and multidirectional networks

of social relations. Lepawsky and Mather (2011) refer to global value chains as ever-changing meshworks of economic, social and spatial relations and activities. Herein, the role of 'actors' and 'actions' are emphasised, rather than the 'things' that are produced. To properly trace and understand the economic activity of value chains, these chains should be embedded in their social, spatial and embodied contexts (Hudson, 2008 in Lepawsky & Mather, 2011; Berndt, 2011). From this perspective, 'value networks' are inherent to a continuous circulation of things between different actors. Deriving from this logic, Lepawsky and Mather (2011, p.243) advocate for "studies of circulation and exchange that search for boundaries and edges" instead of "static beginnings and endings".

Applying this paradigm on Almería's agriculture emphasises the im/mobilities and circularity within the industry: it highlights the trajectories of the agricultural goods and of the labour migrants that provide the actions to produce these goods. The migrant labour force that facilitates Almería's agricultural production is ordered by a plurality of social networks (Corrado, 2017; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014). Due to globalisation and industrialisation, the organisation of labour within Almería's agricultural production has been radically restructured (Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014). Indicated by Aznar-Sanchez et al. (2014) as 'the miracle of Almería', Almería's production network has become highly segmented and involves an increased number of migrant actors originating outside the European Union. Nowadays, labour migrants are employed in multiple segments along Almería's tomato production line (Perrota, 2017; Berndt, 2011; Rye & Scott, 2018; Aznar-Sanchez, 2014). Among these segments are: seed sorting- and distribution centres (Perrota, 2017; Rye & Scott, 2018), greenhouses (Berndt, 2011; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez, 2014; Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014), packaging lines, processing plants (Perrota, 2017;

Berndt, 2011; Rye & Scott, 2018), retail distribution centres (Berndt, 2011; Rye & Scott, 2018) and in product transport (Rippingale, 2019).

Within Almería's agri-industry, migrants frequently transit between jobs and places which results in continuous reconfigurations of labour and social networks. Samaddar (2018, p.134) refers to the mobile and circular character of migrant labour as "transit labour" - "labour transiting from one site to another, and from one form to another" (Samaddar, 2018, p.134). According to Samaddar (2018; 2021), the migrant as a labouring subject is characterised by the capacity to remain 'footloose'. Samaddar (2021, p.24) refers to labour migrants 'being footloose' as "straddling two worlds – the world of citizenship they leave and the world of alien-hood they move into. These two worlds do not present themselves to the migrants as mutually exclusive options. Instead, a new world appears marked by coming, moving further, going back, coming again, going elsewhere – always returning." Between the world of citizenship and alien hood, by which Samaddar refers to the continuously shifting lines of ir/regularity, emerges an extensive migrant labour force. This migrant labour force is featured by its in/formal employment which makes labour more 'transitory.' In this way, transit labour has become an essential element of 'formal' global supply chains in contemporary capitalism. Simultaneously, it is the global nature of value chains that produces a reserve army of footloose and informal labour as employment of migrants simplifies logistics and reduces production costs (Samaddar 2018; 2021).

Aimed at reducing risks and accumulating capital, Samaddar (2021) argues that extractivism of natural and human resources is at the heart of capitalism. Subsequently, he emphasises that colonial legacies of extractivism inherently resonate in contemporary capitalist infrastructures. Samaddar therefore refers to capitalism as "postcolonial capitalism." As a result of the coloniality of contemporary social, spatial and economic

structures of power (Hage, 2016), formal capitalist infrastructures are founded on the extraction of (non-western) migrants. This tendency becomes evident in the configurations of Almería's agricultural industry, which highly depends on in/formal, cheap and flexible migrant labour in order to reduce the production costs and serve consumers' demands for cheap products.

As a result of the cost-cutting dynamics of capitalist economies, transnational supermarket chains and large retailers have acquired powerful bargaining positions within value networks (Rye & Scott, 2018; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al, 2014). Consequently, this has granted them a monopoly which enables powerful actors to require higher productivity and efficiency demands while lowering the production costs (Aznar-Sanchez et al, 2014; Rye & Scott, 2018). Aznar-Sanchez et al (2014, p.117) state that "in many European countries, over 40 per cent of the market share belongs to the three biggest food retailers translating into better sales conditions for retailers and reduced margins for producers." This results in "a race to the bottom" (Rye & Scott, 2018, p.936) where the extraction of ir/regular and footloose labour migrants has become a self-evident way to accumulate capital and cheapen consumers' goods.

2.3. (Producing) ir/regularity

In the context of transit labour in an era of postcolonial capitalism, ir/regularity is a key factor as "the exploitation of migrants as labour is linked to the nature of irregularity, which marks most of the migrant economy, and the migrant as a worker" (Samaddar 2021, p.122). In popular discourse, 'regularity' and 'irregularity' are frequently categorised as binary opposites (Kubal, 2013; De Haas et al., 2020). In this two-fold division,

regular mobility entails movement within the boundaries of law. Irregular mobility, on the other hand, can be defined as migration that takes place outside the regulatory norms of (supra-)national entities (De Haas et al., 2020). As the classifications 'regular' and 'irregular' exist by the grace of (supra-)state regulations, it becomes apparent that these categories are inherently linked to the logic of the modern nation-state and its institutionalised practices of b/ordering.

Several authors (Kubal, 2013; Koser, 2010; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Raulff, 2004) emphasise the ambiguity of ir/regularity encompassing many 'in-between-statuses.' Kubal (2013, p.555) conceptualises these in-between-statuses as 'semi-legality' to which she refers as "a multidimensional space where migrants' formal relationships with the state interact with their various forms of agency toward the law." These ambiguous modes between "law and lawlessness" induce the vulnerability to institutionalised exploitation. Agamben (2004, p.612) describes the tension between the reinforcement and the absence of law as "the state of exception" in which migrants are systematically exceptionalised from rights and freedoms aligned with citizenship.

Aligning with Kubal (2013) and Agamben (Raulff, 2004; Agamben, 2005), Samaddar (2021, p.36) defines these juridical shadow zones as spaces of "sub-existence." He defines "sub-existence" by means of a lack of things: "the lack of facilities, lack of means of life and livelihood, lack of citizenship rights, and a lack of social entitlements, in short, a lack of all that nationality would imply" (Samaddar, 2021, p.36). The lack of legal and social protection in informal employment makes labour migrants vulnerable to exploitation by their employers (De Haas et al., 2020; Rye & Scott, 2018; Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014). Ir/regularity results in migrants' informality and precarity which serve as means to control and to subjugate migrants and exploit their labour potential.

In practice, the spaces between law and lawlessness encompass a bureaucratic maze in which regularisation is a complicated, inconsistent and intransparent procedure (Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Corrado, 2017). Despite the high demand for migrant labour in the Spanish agricultural sector, the institutional frameworks do not facilitate but rather hinder migrants to regularise and therefore limit the supply of formal labour demand (Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014). This, in turn, has resulted in further expansion of irregular mobility and informal labour supply (Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Black, 2003; Koser, 2010; Corrado, 2017). As ir/regularity and in/formality of employment are generally related, migrants aim to navigate themselves in- and out of ir/regularity by means of transiting between in/formal jobs. In this way, the configuration of migration policies produces a transitory labour force that provides subaltern, informal labour but has been deprived from the free juridical status of citizenship (Corrado, 2017; Rye & Scott, 2018; Samaddar, 2021; Samaddar, 2018)

2.4. Autonomy of migration

The interplay between regulatory infrastructures of labour and mobility produces spaces of sub-existence (Samaddar, 2021) and semi-legality (Kubal, 2013) that reinforce exploitation of migrant labour. However, it is important to emphasise that ir/regularity not merely results in maximum dispossession, repression and exploitation (Kubal, 2013; Mezzadra, 2010; Samaddar, 2021). Moreover, the controlling features of labour and mobility regimes are confronted with migrants' collective agency. Mezzadra (2010) and Samaddar (2021) demonstrate how structure inevitably results in agency. Therefore, 'the politics of control' is dialectic to 'the politics of

migration.’ In this dynamic, they state, restrictions on mobility ultimately result in the ‘autonomy of migration.’

Deriving from Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic philosophy (1987), Papadopoulos et al. (2008) refer to the autonomy of migration as a social movement by which migrants navigate themselves throughout social, cultural and economic infrastructures of control. Elaborating on the relation between labour and autonomy, Papadopoulos and Tsianos, (2007, p.9) argue that “in the emerging postliberal conditions, labour becomes mobile and migrants become animals enunciating their subjective lines of flight out of the current rigid and exploitative regimes of accumulation.” This ‘flight out of rigid and exploitative regimes’ aligns with Samaddar (2021, p.121) who states that autonomy of migration emerges when there is the necessity to escape current conditions: “marked by degraded work, controlled by market rules and compulsions, tied to the obligations of supply chains, subjected to low and a differential wage systems, and unregulated labour regimes characterised by violence – it is amidst this set of conditions that migration as a socio-economic and political practice realises its autonomy.” This underlines the continuous dialect between controlling migrants’ im/mobilities and the ways in which migrants circumvent these infrastructures of control.

Schapendonk (2018, p.665) emphasises that the autonomy of migration cannot be merely explained by migrants’ individual agency but moreover emerges from a collective and relational effort. He argues that the evolvement of migrants’ mobility trajectories inherently depends on “social networks, brokering services, helping hands, un/expected encounters and policy interventions.” The conjunction of all (f)actors facilitating and controlling migration can be captured under the umbrella of “migration industries” (Schapendonk, 2018; Ingold, 2011; Cranston et al., 2018). Migration industries are fluid and networked entities,

encompassing a wide range of in/formal f/actors. As migration industries function by means of the relationality between different actors, they can be conceptualised as ‘force fields of relationalities’ (Ingold, 2011) in which social relations, objectives, goals and responsibilities continuously shift (Schapendonk, 2018).

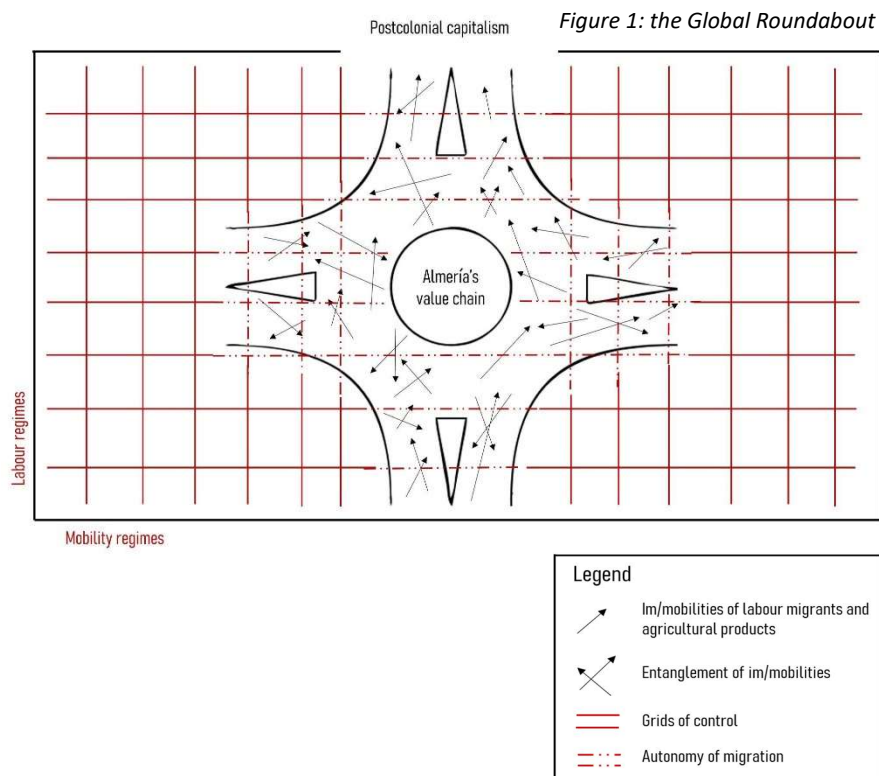
The changeable and relational character of migration industries underlines that social network are not pre-established nor static, but moreover fluid and dynamic. Opposing ‘network determinism’, Schapendonk (2015) argues that the perpetuation of a social network requires migrants’ proactivity, which is captured in the verb *networking*. Referred to by Pathirage and Collyer (2011) as ‘networking work’ migrants ‘socially negotiate’ by strategically mobilising their social relations in order to achieve their personal goals (Schapendonk, 2018). The term ‘negotiation’ naturally implies that there are more f/actors involved and therefore emphasises the relational and mutual effort of the practice (Schapendonk, 2015; Vigh, 2009). As migrants need to mobilise themselves throughout continuously changing social environments, Vigh (2009) proposes the term ‘social navigation.’ The term ‘navigation’ refers to the latin word for ‘to sail’ which entails movement throughout a dynamic landscape. Vigh (2009, p.419) defines ‘social navigation’ as an “alternative perspective on practice and the intersection between agency, social forces and change.” Therefore, labour migrants employed in Almería’s agriculture need to socially navigate an ever-changing landscape of fluid production chains, dynamic migration industries and a bureaucratic maze of labour and mobility regulation. On the junction of agency, social forces and change, migrants navigate themselves throughout infrastructures of control by collectively reclaiming the autonomy over their mobilities.

2.5. A Global roundabout: conceptual lens

This figure is ‘the global roundabout,’ a conceptual model linking the above theoretical outline into a research lens to analyse the empirical findings of this study.⁴ In Almería, roundabouts are frequently used as spaces of in/formal labour recruitment. Therefore, using the shape of a roundabout entails certain symbolism and connects the theoretical foundation to my empirical findings. In this section, I will use this model to explain how the

concepts im/mobilities, value chains, ir/regularity and autonomy of migration relate to each other.

1. This research is contextualised in an era of postcolonial capitalism as ingrained social, economic and spatial infrastructures of colonialism resonate in our contemporary capitalist modes of production and distribution. Postcolonial capitalism is therefore visualised as an overarching force.
2. At the core of postcolonial capitalism are value chains like Almería’s agriculture. Value chains comprise networks of globally entangled im/mobilities of people and products, driven by the accumulation of capital.
3. The red grid indicates the Spanish-European regimes of labour and mobility, together encompassing the infrastructures of control that are at play in Almería’s globally embedded agriculture. These ‘boundaries of law’ are institutionalised mechanisms of in- and exclusion and are therefore inherent to the notion of ir/regularity.
4. The arrows indicate the im/mobilities of goods and people. It is important to emphasise that these arrows do not necessarily indicate the pathways of individuals or a single tomato, but rather signify flows of im/mobility within the system of production. The arrows:
 - a. represent the im/mobilities of agricultural goods, produced in, and distributed from Almería, to a plethora of destinations.
 - b. illustrate the im/mobilities of labour migrants facilitating Almería’s agricultural production. The arrows in the conceptual roundabout, and therefore migrants’



⁴ See Appendix VI for the enlarged image of the model.

movements throughout the system, signifies the transitory nature of migrant workers and thus the constant circularity of labour.

- c. The intersections of the arrows show the entanglements of the im/mobilities people and goods. These im/mobilities are relational because 1) Almería's agricultural production is founded on a transitory migrant labour force, and therefore on migrants' im/mobilities and 2) migrants im/mobilities often mobilise themselves throughout Almería's agriculture, sustaining the hypermobility of capitalised crops.
5. The figure of the roundabout itself represents the mechanism by which im/mobilities of people and goods are regulated in Almería's agricultural industry. This roundabout:
- a. serves as an infrastructural 'mooring' that regulates and facilitates flows of globally distributed crops and of labour migrants that sustain this production. Therefore, this roundabout represents the different segments of Almería's agriculture.
 - b. illustrates the conjunction of supply and demand of agricultural labour in Almería's industry and therefore shows how the entanglements of im/mobilities of labour migrants and agricultural crops emerge.
 - c. operates within 'formal' infrastructures of production but simultaneously 'crosses' the grids of labour and mobility regimes. This signifies the ambiguity of ir/regularity and in/formality, as the boundaries of law often become blurred within capitalised value chains. Almería's 'formal'

value chain exists by the grace of in/formal migrant employment. Therefore, the roundabout is an ambiguous space of 'sub-existence', marked by in/formality and ir/regularity.

- d. Is exemplary for the plenty of other spaces of sub-existence that are scattered across the grids of control. From these spaces emerge migration industries that facilitate and obstruct im/mobilities in alternative ways.
 - e. Is a political space with, although not indicated, slow and fast lanes. As a result of overarching forces like postcolonial capitalism, the regulating mechanisms of the roundabout facilitate some im/mobilities, while obstructing others.
6. The points where the arrows intersect the grids of control indicate ir/regularity and/or in/formality. 'Crossing the lines' demonstrates migrants' collective countermovement to labour- and mobility regimes by challenging the infrastructures of control. 'Migration industries', fluid and relational networks, form the social fabric for alternative, ir/regular and in/formal practices and mobilisations.
7. Challenging the grid of control by means of the networked efforts of migration industries results in the autonomy of migration. The autonomy of migration is visualised by the broken grid, visualising how regimes of control are undermined. The grids of control are therefore in a continuous dialectic with the autonomy of migration.



3. Methods

In this chapter, I outline the methodological considerations, implementations and reflections of this three-month qualitative research. I will scrutinise the empirical context of my research on Almería's agricultural production in sub-chapter 3.1. and outline in 3.2. the qualitative methods that I have applied. In 3.3., I will give further insights in the ways I have analysed my data. In sub-chapter 3.4., I will reflect on ethics, language and my positionality as a researcher in the ethnographic field.

3.1. Almería's Plastic Sea: the Garden of Europe



Almería's greenhouse production is often described as 'The Garden of Europe' as a significant share of Europe's fruit- and vegetable provision is produced in this area (DePablo et al., 2020). The region appears as a 'Plastic Sea', due to the extensive surface area of greenhouses. With more than 31.000 hectares of greenhouses, the province produces around 3.5 million tons of fruits and vegetables annually and is therefore Spain's largest horticultural exporter (Deutsche Welle, 2019; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; DePablo et al., 2020). In the past decades, the production of Almería's 'Plastic Sea' significantly expanded and industrialised and has become increasingly integrated into global value chains. This, in turn, has led to a high demand for cheap and flexible migrant labour to facilitate the region's large-scale agricultural production (Rye & Scott, 2018; Corrado, 2017; Gertel & Sippel, 2014). Therefore, labour migrants have become a fundamental and integral part of Almería's agricultural system (Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014). Nowadays, around 100.000 migrant workers are employed on the fields or in greenhouses in Andalusia⁵. Additionally, 95.000 labour migrants work in different segments of the agricultural distribution and around 8.000 migrants transport fruits and vegetables to supermarkets elsewhere in Europe (Rippingale, 2019).

To demarcate my field of research, I specifically focussed on the areas with the highest concentration of greenhouses in the province of Almería: the cluster around El Ejido, and the region Nijar.⁶ During the three month qualitative research, I did an internship in the day centre of the organisation 'Almería Acoge' in San Isidro's agricultural region. In this centre, Almería Acoge facilitates migrants in practicalities, like showers and laundry machines, and offers them consultations on regulatory procedures and the free services of a lawyer. Being two days a week in the day centre allowed me to meet potential participants, hang-out, have informal

⁵ An autonomous region in the south of Spain. Almeria is a province of Andalusia.

⁶ See map II

conversations, do participant observation during consultations, to join interviews with the lawyer and visit various shantytowns. Overall, it enabled me access to a large group of people and a wide range of activities.

However, San Isidro was not the only place where I have conducted interviews, had informal conversations and did participant observation. The places where I have collected data are scattered throughout the region of El Ejido and San Isidro.

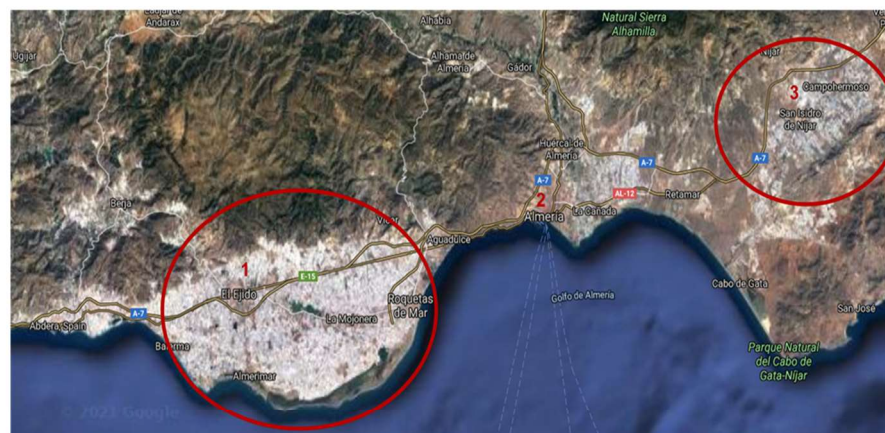
Among these places are roundabouts of El Ejido and San Isidro, various campaigns of the labour union SOC-SAT, SOC-SAT's offices, migrants' houses, shantytowns, different greenhouses, distribution centres, a *semillero* and an auction-house. By visiting a variety of people and places, I aimed to investigate the agricultural system from a diverse set of angles and perspectives.

Map I: Almería, Spain



Province Almería, located in Spain

Map II: Agricultural regions in Almería, Spain



El Ejido (1), Almería capital (2) and Níjar (3), located in Almería, Spain

3.2. Ethnographic research

In this research, I aimed to give a human face to global macrostructures of labour, im/mobility and capital in the context of postcolonial capitalism. Therefore, I have conducted ethnographic research, applying various qualitative methods. Qualitative research aims to unravel people's experiences of daily life and understand the meanings they ascribe to their - social and spatial - practices (Boeije, 2010). Therefore, adopting an emic perspective and inquiring individuals' motive forces and considerations enhances understanding of how their mobility trajectories unfold (Cresswell, 2010; Cresswell, 2007).

However, in her article on the methodological practice of "humbling anthropology," Klinkert (2021), examines the epistemological foundations of empirical research. She argues that there is an intrinsic arrogance in the claim to have the ability to "delve into a myriad of different perspectives and cultural contexts, analyse them, and then revert back to our bird's-eye view of the multitude of attitudes, angles, and behaviours" (Klinkert, 2021, p.311). She consecutively argues that this arrogance is rooted in a racialised inception, as Euro-American ethnographic research's formation is mainly grounded in colonial conquest. To counter White Ignorance in Euro-American centred academics, Klinkert (2021) argues that researchers who inherently sustain this racially-biased system of knowledge production, should "humble" their knowledge. She refers to this as "[...] a process that diminishes ego. [...] Only when we root ourselves in the complicity of a history that is the precondition of modern-day racialized epistemology and commit to a reflexivity that traces these colonial continuities into the present, can we counter the detrimental nature of this ego's arrogance." By conducting ethnographic research, I

aimed to gain deeper insights into labour migrants' experiences and im/mobilities within Almería's production network. Nonetheless, I do not claim to fully represent migrants' lived realities and experiences, as the data presented in this research is inevitably shaped by my personal lens. This lens is inherent to the wealth and white privilege that I have experienced throughout my life, and the Euro-centric nature of my education that has shaped the ways in which the knowledge of this thesis is produced.⁷

To better comprehend the relational dynamics within migration industries, I have applied a network perspective. Marcus (1995) propagates the necessity to focus on global macrostructures and interconnectivity by conducting ethnography within networks. To investigate im/mobilities of both agricultural products and the labour migrants that facilitate this system, I have additionally applied a mobility perspective. Law and Urry (2004, p.403) argue that conventional (non-mobile) methods poorly deal with the fleeting, the distributed and "the pleasures and pains that follow the movement and displacement of people, objects, information and ideas." Adopting a mobility perspective has therefore allowed me to conceptualise the processes of mobility as entities of inquiry, including periods of immobility (Schapendonk, 2018). Although this research has been demarcated by the region of Almería, I have moved throughout social networks and therefore between 'ocial sites. This, in turn, has enabled me to investigate the relationality of social networks. Although I did not physically move along with the participants of my study, we stayed in touch by means of text messages and phone calls.

Furthermore, I have approached my research objective from different methodological angles and therefore used methodological

⁷ I will further elaborate on my positionality as a researcher in paragraph 3.4.

triangulation (Boeije, 2010). I have used several qualitative methods that complement each other as “different sources of data [helped] to examine a phenomenon in several different settings and different points in time or space” (Reeves et al., 2008, p. 513). In the next sections, I will delve further in the various methods I have applied to collect qualitative data.

3.2.1. (Participant) observation

According to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, p.1) “participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and culture.” This is crucial to attain a ‘thicker’ understanding of labour migrants’ lived realities and the meanings they ascribe to their daily practices (Laurier, 2016). Participant observation entails, among other things, ‘hanging out’, participating in activities and having informal conversations (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Laurier, 2016). Informal conversations or so-called ‘small talk’ proved very helpful to extend my network, learn the focal vocabulary and build trust and rapport with potential participants (Driessen & Jansen, 2013).

As mentioned previously⁸, my research sites have been scattered throughout the region of Almería and entail different places where I did (participant) observation. The activities I have engaged in allowed me to a diverse extent to participate. The day centre of Almería Acoge was a space that allowed me to participate in many daily practices of the centre, like checking-in migrants, doing laundry shifts, joining consultations and to “hang-out” in the outside waiting space. The (participant) observations I did during my shifts in Almería Acoge’s day centre have proved as

significant input to further elaborate on in interviews (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). For example, I have witnessed multiple consultations on regularisation procedures in the day centre. These conversations have provided me insights into the prevalent obstructions migrants encounter in the Spanish mobility regime. By means of methodological triangulation and approaching the system from different angles, I could consecutively further elaborate on these topics in interviews with labour migrants and Almería Acoge’s lawyer.

“Hanging out” and informally chatting with migrants in the waiting space of Almería’s day centre has thereby contributed to a deeper understanding into the “practice of waiting”, both in practical and existential sense. I discovered that waiting - on regularisation procedures to proceed, institutions to react, labour contracts to be signed - occupies a major asset in most of migrants’ lives. Relating to all these immensely slow and long-term objectives, half a day of waiting in line for a consultation with Almería Acoge was therefore to most of them a common thing. Although I could, ofcourse, not replace myself in migrants’ shoes and contexts, waiting with them in the burning sun has shifted my perception of time and waiting. This change of perception could therefore be seen as the tip of the iceberg in emically understanding migrants’ experiences of “waiting in the system.”

Beside participant observation, I did non-participant observation in different research sites: in a distribution centre, several greenhouses, a *semillero*, an auction house and different roundabouts. All these contexts did not allow me to participate in the situations for different reasons. The production- and distribution sites were too streamlined for the temporal participation of an outsider. However, merely observing the actions and

⁸ See 3.1.1.

actors within these situations have served as relevant context to my understanding of the industrialisation and scale of Almería's production. I also did not participate in any activities on the roundabouts, as this did not feel ethical from my position. Instead, I primarily observed and documented the different practices that took place.

3.2.2. Interviews

To obtain more specific and in-depth information from different participants involved in Almería's agricultural production, I conducted semi-structured interviews, narrative interviews and had many informal conversations. All of them, except for one, were in the Spanish language. In one interview I was supported by Habib, a dear friend of mine, who translated the interview from Wolof and French to English and Spanish. Before every interview I asked for informed consent and, if desirable, guaranteed anonymity.

3.2.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

To gather a coherent collection of data, I conducted semi-structured interviews. This type of interview is neither confined to a fixed set of questions, nor completely open-ended. To cover consistent and comparable topics within these interviews, I designed an extensive topic list in which I have operationalised my research questions.⁹ Conducting semi-structured interviews has enabled me to remain flexible and simultaneously leave room for participants to bring up subjects that they themselves consider important (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). This is in line with Matthews (2005) who argues that interviewing is about asking

questions in order to facilitate participants to address topics they want to talk about, rather than elicit answers to specific questions.

According to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, p.138), the level of control of the researcher and the uniformity of the ways in which the questions are posed is "more a continuum than a fixed method." Therefore, every interview I conducted required my adaptation to the person I talked with and the nature of our relationship. Frequently, an interview was preceded by (several) informal conversation(s), by which participants and I established mutual trust and rapport.

Throughout my research I specified the topics I wanted to focus on, as I gained more insight in the most prevalent themes "on the way." Conducting semi-structured interviews has been a significant method within this fieldwork. It has provided a 'thick' understanding of people's motivations, individual objectives, encounters with the system, problems and relations and subsequently how these assets configure in their social- and spatial mobilisations.

3.2.2.2. Narrative interviews

A particular form of interviewing that I applied in this research is 'narrative interviewing' in which I asked participants to tell me their life histories (Rosenthal, 1993). Narrative interviews are minimally structured by the interviewer, except for the question to tell one's life history (Boeije, 2010). In the context of this research, I mostly started with the question 'why participants left their hometowns and how their journeys had evolved from there.' This type of interviewing proved very valuable to unravel and comprehend the twists and turns of migrants' mobility trajectories. Documenting a biographical account has given insights into labour

⁹ See Appendix III.

migrants' personal considerations and the actors that have influenced, facilitated and obstructed their mobilities (Schapendonk, 2018). However, I did not apply this method with all participants. I considered a trustful relationship important in order to delve completely in their personal and emotional trajectories. The narrative interviews that I have conducted proved very useful in the reconstruction of migrants' social networks and the significance to migrants' trajectories of these networks.

3.2.2.3. Informal conversations

Besides conducting (and recording) interviews, I had informal conversations with labour migrants, social workers, employees of the labour union, employees and managers of the distribution centre and the auction house, Almería Acoge's lawyer, activists and farmers. Having informal conversations, referred to by Driessen and Jansen (2013, p.250) as "small talk" enabled me to "establish, maintain and expand" my social network and thus to socially navigate myself throughout my field of research (Vigh, 2009). I documented my informal conversations in jot notes, which I further elaborated on in my field notes. From my experiences in the field, I consider the relevance of informal conversations two-folded: informal conversations can serve as convenient starting points to build rapport, to eventually be followed-up with a more 'formal' interview. Besides serving as a 'stepping stone', informal conversations themselves can already encompass very rich information. On roundabouts and in growing- and production places I had many conversations that proved to be useful during the analysis of my data. Furthermore, I noticed that some people were not keen to be recorded during an interview but were willing to talk and share freely in an 'informal' setting.

3.3. Implementation

In this subchapter I will further elaborate on the implementation of the qualitative methods that I have described previously. In 3.3.1., I start with giving an overview of the people that have participated in this study. Subsequently, in paragraph 3.3.2., I will elaborate on the ways by which I established contact with the persons that have participated in this study and therefore gained access to the field(s) and greenhouses. Paragraph 3.3.3. comprises a summary of the process of data analysis.

3.3.1. Almería's various voices: research participants

In this research, I aim to give Almería's agriculture a human face and investigate the extensive and global configurations of the system from multiple perspectives. Therefore, I have conducted interviews and informal conversations with actors who are differently involved in Almería's agricultural industry. This has allowed me to gain further understanding in the intrinsic and complex relationality of im/mobilities people, goods and capital in value chains and migration industries. This aligns with Schapendonk (2018, p.676) who emphasises that including multiple perspectives "helps us to identify the synergies and frictions at play and the efforts that are needed to produce migrant im/mobility."

During this qualitative research, I conducted nineteen semi-structured interviews with a variety of participants, as shown in figure 2. Additionally, I had fifty-four informal conversations that I formally documented in my field- and jot notes, demonstrated in figure 3. As becomes evident from the two charts below, the majority of the people that I have talked with identify themselves as (labour) migrants. This inevitably has affected the focal of my thesis, as I gathered most data from the perspective of migrant workers in Almería. The labour migrants I have talked with originated from Morocco, Mali, Senegal, Bulgaria, Mauritania,

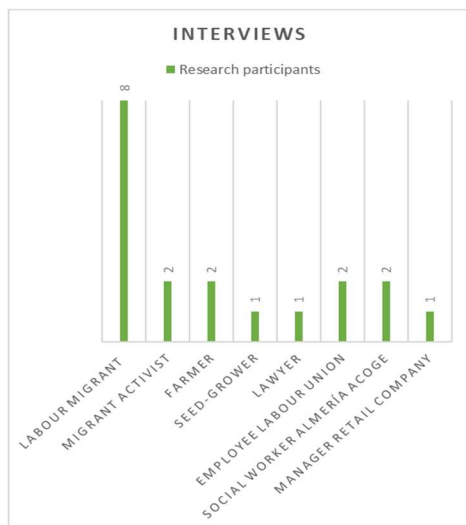


Figure 2: Interviews research participants

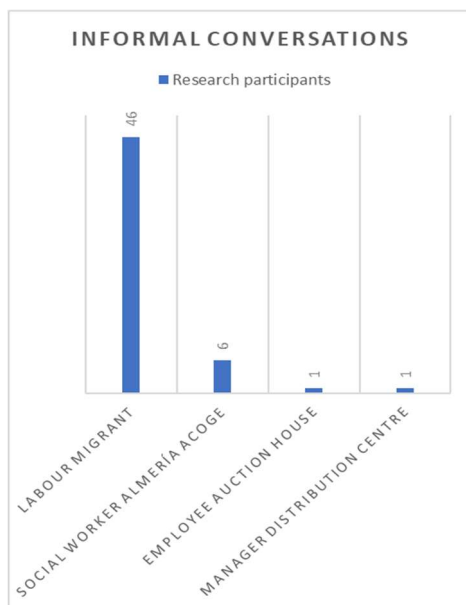


Figure 3: Informal conversations research participants

Guinee-Bissau and Romania and are all employed in different segments of Almería’s agriculture.¹⁰ Although there is also an extensive number of female workers in Almería, I mostly encountered men. As this study does not explicitly focus on gender, I will not make specific claims on the representation of gender within this research. Due to the ambiguity of ir/regularity and to avoid essentialising legal categories, I do not categorise the participants within this research by their legal status.

3.3.2. Gaining access to the field(s)

To get in touch with potential research participants, I used several ‘gatekeepers’ (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). From these starting points, I have used the ‘snowball method.’ Snowball sampling entails seeking for potential participants by means of social networks and shared knowledge (Boeije, 2010; Hennink et al., 2011). In this way, I have ‘socially navigated’ (Vigh, 2009; Schapendonk, 2018) myself throughout the dynamic field of social relations that sustains Almería’s agriculture. To avoid “snowballing” within the same social network, I “used several starting points for snowball recruitment” (Hennink et al., 2011, p.101). I will shortly outline from which ‘gates’ I was able to enter the field and thus gained access to different actors within Almería’s agriculture.

Firstly, as mentioned before, my collaboration with the NGO Almería Acoge has given me the opportunity to meet participants with different perspectives on Almería’s agriculture. While working with Almería Acoge, I have met multiple migrants working in agriculture, social workers with embodied knowledge on regularisation procedures and a lawyer with expertise in Spain’s juridical constructions regarding labour and migration.

Secondly, I contacted Almería’s labour union SOC-SAT which resulted in interviews with the unions’ leader and several employees.

¹⁰ See Appendix II for a more detailed description in the List of participants.

Besides that, SOC-SAT connected me to various migrants who have been engaged in activism propagating social justice in Almería's plastic sea. These activists were willing to do interviews with me and introduced me to their activism and lived realities. Furthermore, I could join several campaigns organised by the labour union in which they aimed to mediate between employers and employees within the agricultural industry. Therefore, the SOC-SAT, being a gatekeeper, has introduced me to a diverse range of actors that are all - differently - engaged with the practices within Almería agriculture.

Thirdly, through my personal social network I came in contact with Pablo, a young farmer from El Ejido. Beside sharing his extensive knowledge on agriculture and labour migration, Pablo has been an incredibly important gatekeeper that has introduced me to several actors in the agricultural industry. He introduced me to a *semillero*, a distribution cooperative and arranged my access to the auction house. Without having a contact person in the industry, it proved complicated to reach the people being deployed in managing positions.

Lastly, I got in contact with many labour migrants by means of 'hanging-out', 'small talk', informal conversations and participant observation on the roundabouts of El Ejido and San Isidro. Roundabouts serve as 'informal recruitment places', where labour supply and demand meet. Therefore, these are spaces where in/formal social networks can be established. Through a farmer, I could get the coordinates of the roundabouts and go there before sunrise. Here I had multiple informal conversations with labour migrants which eventually have led to more formal follow-up interviews.

All in all, these various 'gates' to the field have allowed me to examine my field from different perspectives. It should be emphasised that the data that I have collected through these networks is inherently biased as it encompasses cases and experiences of individuals that cannot be generalised to 'one coherent truth' (Boas et al., 2020).

3.3.3. Data documentation and analysis

During this ethnographic research, I used (participant) observation, several types of interviews and informal conversations to gain a deeper understanding of the lived realities of participants. Evidently, all methods require different ways of documentation: I recorded and transcribed the interviews and documented observations and conversations in detailed fieldnotes. In addition, I kept a logbook in which I documented my activities and a diary for my personal reflections, thoughts and experiences concerning the research. As DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, p.157) argue: "if you didn't write it down in your field notes, it didn't happen." By making fieldnotes, my observations remained vivid and detailed although inevitably biased due to the inherent subjectivity of my positionality as researcher. This underlines the necessity to continuously reflect on my own positionality within different contexts to improve the validity and transparency of my data (Boeije, 2010).

Boeije (2010) states that the procedure of collecting, structuring, reassembling and analysing data is a cyclic process. Doing these activities simultaneously during my fieldwork allowed me to keep an overview of my findings and gave insight into patterns and missing pieces in my data. To systematically analyse my findings, I have applied the 'grounded theory' in which I respectively ascribed open codes, axial codes and selective codes to all my collected data - interviews, fieldnotes and personal reflections - in the coding software 'NVivo'. My research aim and questions have been the lens through which I have segmented and reassembled the collected data. By open coding, I have distilled important themes. Subsequently, ascribing axial codes to these themes enabled me to categorise them and seek for interlinkages. In the process of selective coding I have determined core themes and concepts that eventually have become the backbone of this thesis.

3.4. Reflections

In this subchapter 3.4. I will examine and critically reflect on the process of doing ethnographic fieldwork. In 3.4.1., I reflect on the colonial foundations of Euro-American ethnographic fieldwork and elaborate on the consecutive considerations on ethics and language in this study. Building further on these reflections, I will investigate and reflect on my positionality as researcher in paragraph 3.4.2.

3.4.1. Ethics and language

Touched upon in chapter 3.2, Klinkert (2021) demonstrates how the epistemological foundations of Euro-American ethnographic research are mainly grounded in colonial conquest. Also, Berry et al. (2017, p.537) foreground this argument and emphasise that the ethnographic field is “the milieu for knowledge production. It is a physical place as well as an epistemological space of investigation shaped by histories of European and U.S. imperialism and colonialism.” Because of the epistemology of ethnographic fieldwork and the coloniality of the global distribution of wealth, mobility and power, 'the field' is not a neutral space, nor is my position as western researcher. Doing research as a white, western woman with migrants subject to European mobility restrictions comes along with ingrained power imbalances and therefore with extensive ethical considerations. Both Klinkert (2021) and Berry et al. (2017) stress how research approaches founded on the Euro-American tradition are frequently complicit in reinforcing certain power dynamics, instead of deconstructing them.

In this research and thesis, I have aimed to challenge the pervasive power dynamics of western knowledge production and therefore decolonialise, instead of reinforcing these deeply embedded infrastructures. In my research approach, this objective has resonated in the establishment of reciprocal relations with participants, based on a mutual exchange to avoid ‘extractivist’ methods of data collection. In this way, I objected to decolonising the researcher - researched relation, which is inherently prone to the coloniality of the power dynamics at play. Wolfe (2006, p.388 *in* Hage, 2016) argues that “colonialism is a structure, not an event” which consequently means that decolonising is an ongoing process of deconstruction and self-investigation. By reflecting on my positionality as a researcher¹¹ and the categories and language I apply in this thesis, I aim to give insight into the considerations and thoughts that preceded this research and its product.

Researching labour mobility from a Western perspective, Dahinden (2016) emphasises the importance of being conscious of the entanglement of the institutionalised nation-state migration apparatus and the categories used within migration discourse. She opposes the supposedly natural distinction between the categories and argues that there is danger of essentialism in the reproduction of existing classifications (Dahinden, 2016). Being conscious of the intrinsic political - and ever-changing - character of language, I do apply the category ‘migrant’ in this thesis, as most participants classified themselves in this manner. In this categorical choice, I want to emphasise that I do not define these people merely by the characteristic of ‘being a migrant’ but aim to give a thicker description of who they are as people. While being critical on the nation-state categories of in- and exclusion in migration research, Dahinden (2016, p.2211) also

¹¹ See chapter 3.4.2.

acknowledges that the normalisation of these categories create “specific social realities and inequalities.” In this research, I aim to highlight how (supra-)state migration apparatus intentionally produce differences concerning rights, policy, social services and mobility. In this context of articulated differences, I have adopted the term ‘migrant’.

3.4.2. The slow and fast lanes of the field: positionality



It is the end of March (2022) when I walk out of the supermarket in Utrecht where I regularly go to. My bag is filled with two bell peppers, an eggplant and a box of cherry tomatoes originating from, yes indeed, Spain. As usual, Jamal, a Moroccan homeless man, sells the ‘street newspaper’ in front of the supermarket. Amin told me that, years ago, he came by boat from Morocco with the prospect to brighten his future in the north of Europe.

On his way, he lived in various Spanish cities, among which Almería, where he worked in the greenhouse production. When the automatic supermarket doors slide open, Amin and I make eye contact. “Selma! When are you going on holiday to Spain again?” he asks me in a hoarse voice after taking a drag from his cigarette. “Within a few weeks!” I answer him, “but it won’t be a real holiday, I will work there.” Amin looks at me while his eyes start twinkling. “Work? Are you going to pick vegetables there?” Just after he asked me the question, he starts laughing out loud and repeats the phrase several times, seemingly imagining that I would pick vegetables in Almería. After Amin has recovered, we joke, make a chit-chat and say goodbye. Later, on my way home, the situation keeps resonating in my head. What does this situation mean? The bag with Spanish vegetables literally and figuratively feels heavy. This conversation accurately underlined my positionality in this research: I am and will remain the white and privileged consumer of this system.

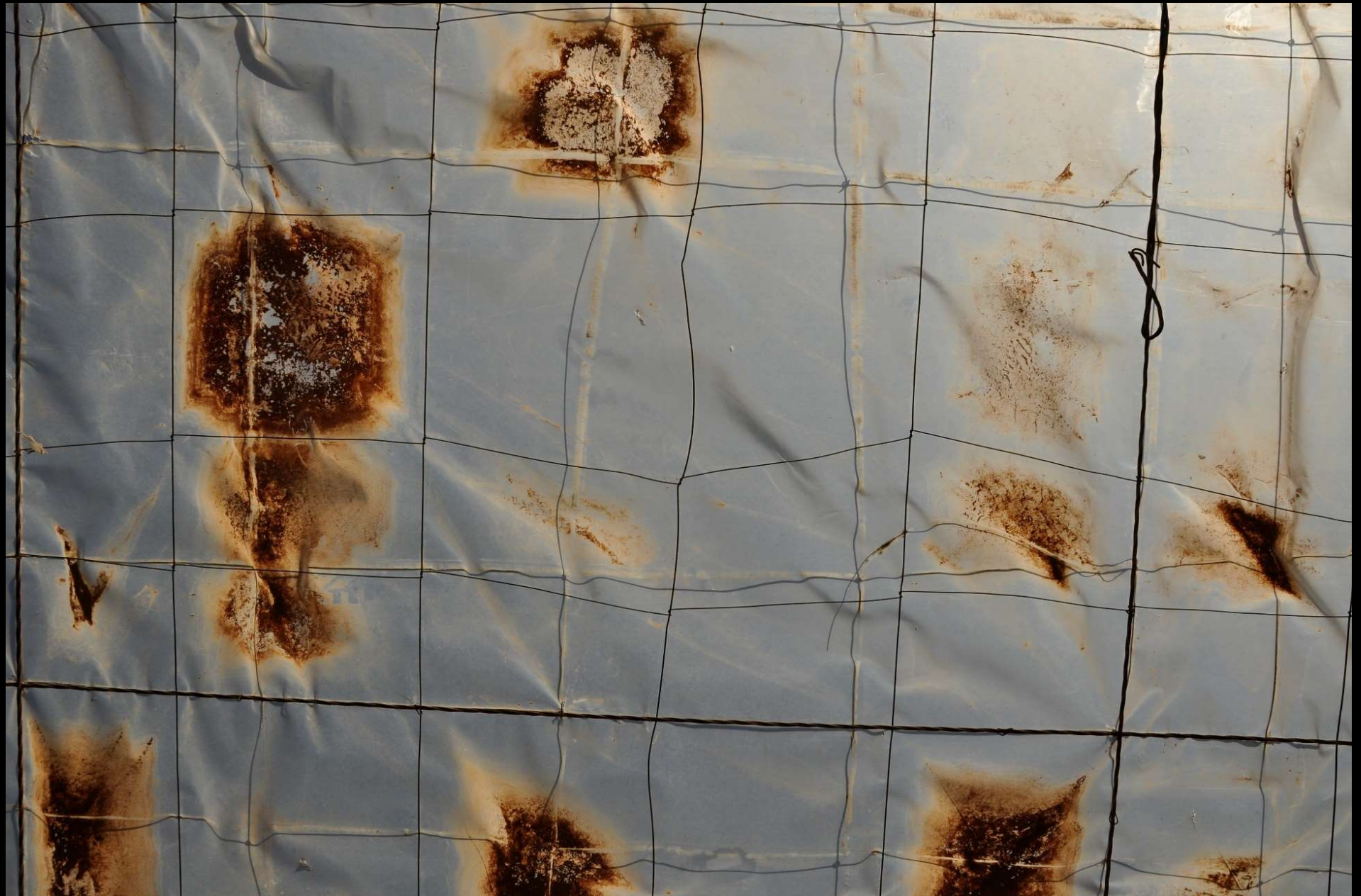
The above situation encompasses many components on which I have reflected before, during and after my fieldwork in Almería and tells about my positionality in this research and within the capitalist system of food production. My positionality in the current configuration of this system seems so established that Amin starts laughing at the idea that I, as a white, wealthy, Dutch woman, would pick vegetables in Almería. This articulates the racialised lines between extractive production and consumerism. The colour of my skin and the place where I was born have made me one of the privileged in our capitalist order, built on the colonial legacies of our past. So, from this perpetuated position, what can I actually understand and write on the lived realities and experiences of im/mobility of migrants in Almería? And how have my racial, national and socio-economic characteristics affected the data that I have collected? To what extent can

this qualitative thesis be representative for the people experiencing the system? These questions are in line with the critical examinations on qualitative research on mobility of Khosravi (2018) and Cabot (2016). Can privileged academics “put oneself in the shoes of the “Other”?” (Boas et al, 2020, p.138) No, we cannot argues Khosravi (2018). And therefore, it is incredibly important to look in the ‘critical mirror’ (Boas et al., 2020) to recognize, acknowledge and reflect on our positionalities, biases and the power relations in research.

I have experienced the contrast between my privileged mobility and the restricted mobility of participants of this research as painful and striking. To concretise the contradiction: my Dutch passport allows me to travel visa-free to 110 countries worldwide (Passport Index, 2022). In comparison, people from Senegal can travel visa-free to 29 countries globally, Moroccans to 28 countries and people from Mali to 25 (Passport Index, 2022). The juxtaposition of my own mobility and of the people I talked with, highlights “the slow and fast lanes of the globe” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p.207) within this research. Aparna, Schapendonk and Merlin-Escorza (2020, p.113) encourage researchers to emphasise these uneven geographies of mobility by “centring one’s own embodied experiences of mobility and reflecting on one’s motility (mobility potential) in ‘the field’”, rather than only reflecting on the im/mobility of others. By ‘demystifying’ the differences in mobility and making them explicit in the ethnography, these experiences and observations serve as a tool for intersubjectivity between the researcher and participants. In the next section, retrieved from my fieldnotes, I will scrutinise some of the many contrasts that I encountered in the field. This can be a beginning to demystify the differences in mobility and lived realities between me and those who participated in this study.

A crowded beach full of white bodies and coloured parasols. A white sea of greenhouses and on a sandy road a man with a jerry can. Transcribing an interview on my new laptop in my air-conditioned room. Talking to people who just lost everything in a fire, surrounded by charred land where yesterday their neighbours lived. The looks I get when I walk down San Isidro’s streets. The looks he gets when he walks down San Isidro’s streets. The self-evident wealth I grew up with. The constant doubt to be allowed to exist somewhere. The courgettes, peppers and tomatoes that I stir into my pasta at night. The crates of tomatoes, peppers and courgettes that he loads into the truck from the distribution centre. The foreign language in which we both search for words. The bus I book to return home. The boat he took "para buscar la vida."

Due to my positionality, the knowledge I present in this research is inherently subjective and limited. As Geertz (1986, p.373), argued: a researcher can merely “scratch surfaces.” I, as a white researcher from the Netherlands, cannot represent the experiences and lived realities of the people who participated in this research. By establishing and maintaining social relations with participants, exchanging knowledge - instead of extracting it - and reflecting together on our relation, I aim to resonate the voices of the people I have talked with, without claiming a full representation or an absolute truth.



4. Underneath Almería's whitewashed roofs

"I congratulate you. You have the good fortune not to be a planter. I do not like slavery, I assure you, and I like less living here, but someone must manage the colonies if you are to put sugar in your coffee and smoke a cigar. In France, they avail themselves of our products, but no one wants to know how they are obtained."

*In Isabel Allende (2010), *Island Beneath the Sea*.*

As Spitou Mendy and I oversee Roquetas' mountainous landscape, the plastic sea of greenhouses continues as far as our sight reaches. The air is hot and the surroundings are of great absence of people. 'What happens under this extensive surface of plastic roofs?' is the question that keeps spinning in my head. Spitou Mendy comments on our view. "Under these whitewashed plastic roofs, there are more than 20.000 migrant workers who are invisibly suffering. This is the system. [...] But this system does not acknowledge persons, it only acknowledges capital and money."

In this chapter I will examine the relation between labour migration and the accumulation of capital by investigating how migrant labour is embedded in Almería's globalised agricultural industry. In subchapter 4.1., I will demonstrate how Almería's agricultural production unfolds in and beyond Almería. Subsequently, in subchapter 4.2., I will delineate how migrant labour is structurally embedded in this globalised system of production.

4.1: Almería's transiting value chain

In subchapter 4.1. I will outline how Almería's agricultural production unfolds in and beyond Almería. In paragraph 4.1.1., I examine the effects of globalisation on the functioning of Almería's agricultural production and the various actors involved. I will further explore in 4.1.2. which actors are involved in Almería's globalised agri-industry and show how these actors ensemble networks that facilitate agricultural production. In paragraph 4.1.3., I demonstrate the effects of the segmentation of Almería's agricultural production on the relationalities between the different actors of the chain.

4.1.1: From family business to global industry

The 'Campoejido Cooperative' is located in the vast plastic sea surrounding the city of El Ejido. I am visiting Campoejido's *semillero*¹², a department of the Campoejido Cooperative that germinates seeds and sells them as young plants to farmers. In a spacious hall, seeds are planted mechanically in styrofoam boxes. Afterwards, workers carry the boxes to different rooms where the seeds will germinate, grow into plants to eventually end up as small plants in the *semillero's* greenhouse. José Manuel, a technical employee who has been working for the company for over thirty years, patiently guides me through the crops' growing processes and simultaneously through the agricultural developments of the region.

In a cylindrical greenhouse, amidst a plethora of Styrofoam beds filled with small plants, José Manuel declares, slightly astonished: "I don't know when this region will stop growing. A decade ago, I thought El Ejido's limit had

¹² A seed-growing centre where seeds are germinated to eventually be sold as plants.

already been reached, but new plastic roofs keep emerging. Once they ran out of space around El Ejido, they started expanding the area around Nijar.”¹³ José Manuel grew up in an agricultural family in El Ejido and has witnessed the rapid changes Almería’s agriculture has faced the past decades. “Forty years ago, every family just had a piece of land to provide themselves with a comfortable life. They were not producing all year round, but only during the period that was necessary to generate sufficient income. Now the region is just producing as much as possible. This is not normal agriculture; this is pure industry.”



¹³ A different agricultural region of Almeria, as explained in chapter 3.1.1.

José Manuel states that the industrialisation of Almería’s agriculture inevitably has led to a segmentation of the fruit and vegetable production. “Before, companies like *semilleros* did not really exist. Every family took care of all the steps of the production process themselves: germinating the seeds, renovating the greenhouse, cleaning the land and growing and distributing the crops. Nowadays, all these activities are differentiated and divided over multiple companies.” According to José Manuel, the industrialisation of Almería’s agriculture went hand in hand with the globalised nature of food production and the increased demand for cheap fruits and vegetables. “Everything is global now.”

Underlining this statement, José Manuel points to the multiple bags of seeds that are spread out on a table. “We imported these seeds from all over the world. They come from The Netherlands, Portugal, South America, Spain, the United States and multiple other countries. Subsequently, in our *semillero*, the seeds are grown by workers from Morocco, Russia, Bulgaria, Argentina and Senegal. Afterwards, in the greenhouses, migrants from all places grow our plants into crops that are eventually transported to countries all over the world.” Asking him whether Almería’s current scale of production would be possible without migrant labour, José Manuel resolutely nods his head. “The expansion of scale resulted in an increased demand for manual labour. Because no one from the region wants to do this heavy work for low salaries, migrants are essential to keep the system running.”¹⁴

As exemplified by Jose Manuel, the region’s industrialisation and therefore the expansion of production, has emerged dialectically with an increased global demand for cheap fruits and vegetables. Having witnessed Almería’s agricultural developments, José Manuel emphasises that the

¹⁴ Interview N.4. See Appendix II.

globalisation and industrialisation of Almería's food production has caused two major changes in the functioning of the system. Firstly, the expansion of production resulted in the segmentation of Almería's value chain. Secondly, it culminated in a strong increase for manual labour which has been largely met by migrants.

José Manuel's observations are in line with the findings of Aznar-Sanchez et al. (2014) who investigated the 'miracle of Almería' as a model of agricultural modernisation. In this research, they show how the restructuring of labour - from small-scale, all-round family businesses to an intensified and segmented agri-industry - has significantly elevated the inflow of labour migrants and resulted in large-scale global export from Almería. Therefore, industrialisation, the so-called 'miracle' that has turned Spain's poorest region into its largest exporter of fruits and vegetables, is both a cause and a consequence of the increased global embeddedness of Almería's agrarian sector (Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; Rye & Scott, 2018; Gertel & Sippel, 2014).

4.1.2: The people of Almería's networked production

Due to the segmented nature of Almería's industry, it encompasses a multitude of different actors that together facilitate the global supply of fruits and vegetables. Among the actors are *semilleros* that germinate seeds, greenhouses that grow and harvest crops, cooperatives and auction houses that collect, sell and distribute products, intermediaries that buy products on behalf of supermarkets and redistribute them, packaging lines, processing plants, retail distribution platforms and transport organisations (Perrota, 2017; Rye & Scott, 2018; Berndt, 2011; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez, 2014; Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014). Collectively, all these actors enable seeds to become agricultural products

that eventually end up neatly wrapped and processed in the consumers' supermarket cart.

As the words 'production line' and 'value chain' intrinsically imply the configuration of the actors along value chains is frequently conceptualised as linear and unidirectional (Lepawsky & Mather, 2011). In their aim to counteract this discourse, Lepawsky & Mather (2011) emphasise the necessity to analyse the actors and actions in global value chains, instead of merely focussing on the things that are produced. Together, these actors comprise fluid and interdependent networks of social relations. As these value networks are dependent on mutual exchange, they produce and are produced by a multitude of multi-directional flows of mobility. As explained by Jose Manuel, the global origin of the seeds, the diverse descent of the workers and the widespread destinations of the agricultural products are indicative of the trajectories of people, goods and capital that all constitute the production of agricultural goods. However, without spaces of fixity, like José Manuel's *semillero* and all the other static segments of Almería's food production chain, these mobilities could not be facilitated. Thus, infrastructural sites of immobility, defined by Urry (2003) as 'moorings', are fundamental to enable flows of mobility. Therefore, networks of production consist of interdependent actors, composing networks of mobility that function in a complex interplay of mobilities and moorings (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2003).

Analysing Almería's value chain as a multi-directional meshwork of mobilities and moorings shows how the im/mobilities of people, goods and capital fundamentally require each other's involvement and are thus entangled (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Law, 2004; Cresswell, 2010; Adey, 2006). The different segments that constitute Almería's agricultural production are places of stasis, moorings, that channel and facilitate these entangled mobilities (Sheller & Urry, 2006;

Urry, 2003). The following situation, in which I visited an auction in auction house 'Agroponiente' illustrates how a place of fixity facilitates flows of mobility.

On an industrial estate in El Ejido, a group of large, grey and angular buildings, indicate 'Agroponiente' on a blue billboard. The surrounding terrain is scattered with high stacks of pallets which are loaded in a dozen trucks by a group of employees. Pablo, a farmer from El Ejido, and I arrive in the hall where the auction will take place soon.

At the entrance, there is a scale where farmers weigh the harvest they deliver. Afterwards, their stocks are labelled, transported by a team of employees on trolleys and piled up in the central hall. Organised per crop, the space is filled with lots of tomatoes, bell peppers, cucumbers, watermelons, aubergines and courgettes of which the next destination will soon be determined.

People with block notes in their hands walk throughout the piles of fruits and vegetables. The persons examine the products carefully, take notes and make phone calls. Pablo tells me that these persons are so-called 'intermediaries' who are hired by supermarkets with the assignment to buy batches of fruit and vegetables. The quantity can vary each time and depends on the demand of the consumer. According to Pablo, the frequent phone calls are probably with their clients - the supermarkets - to discuss the quality and quantity of the potential purchases. Meanwhile, trolleys are racing criss-cross through the hall, adding up the piles.

More and more people make their way towards a fluorescently lit room in the corner of the hall. Pablo and I follow. The room is bright and air-conditioned and has ten tables on either side. Each table has two

buttons with which a buyer can claim a lot. Pablo explains that, in the reverse auction, the person with the first bid has the first choice. At exactly 2 p.m, mutual conversations are interrupted by an auctioneer who opens the auction through a microphone. "First round, cucumbers" he announces after which the starting amount per kilo appears on the big screen above him. "The nice ones from Juan" jokes the auctioneer. "I want these from Juan!" sounds from the room. At a rapid pace, the screen shows how the starting amount is decreasing. The men in the room look concentrated at the screen with their fingers on the button. 70 cents per kilo, 56, 42, stop. "Sold to Pepe for 42 cents per kilo, nothing more." A note is made by the auctioneer and the next round is announced.

Outside the auction room, the farmers that are selling their products can follow the auction on a screen and see for how much their products are sold. "The prices of bell peppers are horrible" whispers Pablo to me, adding that these are maybe sold under the production price. Within half an hour, all the stocks are sold and the auction is closed. Joking among themselves, the intermediaries leave the auction room and re-enter the hall to pick their lots. The farmers, whose products have just been sold for a favourable or less favourable price, walk with them. Some farmers go home with a profit, others with disappointment. The pallets are allocated and, again, trolleys criss-cross through the hall towards the trucks waiting outside to be loaded. The products' next destination is determined.¹⁵

This situation shows why mobility and immobility should not be analysed as opposites, but rather as relational forces that exist by the grace of each other (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). Auction house *Agroponiente*, as a fixed place situated in a remote industrial area, is essential for the

¹⁵ Interview/conversation N.8. See Appendix II.

facilitation of multiple flows of mobility: mobilities of fruits- and vegetables deriving from greenhouses; mobilities of employees coming from different countries in order to work in Almería; and the mobilities of trucks from and to a multitude of destinations for worldwide distribution. All these mobilities encompass the mobility of financial capital from *semilleros*, to farmers, to auction houses, to intermediaries and to supermarkets. This shows how capital, and thus capitalism, is an important driving force for this globalised system of food provision.

4.1.3. A race to the bottom



Almería's integration in the global capitalist system has allowed producers to expand their businesses and their financial benefit. Daniel, a young farmer from San Isidro, explains how both the spatial and economic growth of the region has affected him personally. With his dad, he runs two greenhouses in which they produce tomatoes and watermelons all year round. While walking through the heat of his greenhouse, Daniel tells: "We have to feed the world, or Europe at least...That's why Almería keeps growing. Very fast. [...] Young people that inherited greenhouses from their parents want to earn more than the previous generation. So, they buy more hectares (of land, to construct greenhouses) and Almería grows."¹⁶

However, the financial benefits of Almería's economic growth are mostly unequally divided among the different segments of the value chain (Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014). Simultaneously with globalisation and the consequent segmentation of the production chain, unequal power structures have emerged within Almería's agricultural production. As illustrated by the configuration of *Agroponiente's* reverse auction, agricultural producers are dependent on many other actors to export, process, distribute and therefore capitalise their products. Producers' dependency allows large retailers and supermarkets to increasingly exert bargaining power (Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Sippel, 2017; Rye & Scott, 2018). Consequently, the strengthened bargaining position of large retailers has resulted in "better sales conditions for retailers and reduced margins for producers." (Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014, p.118).

Daniel explains that, to him personally, these reduced margins cause dependency and risk. To capitalise his tomatoes and watermelons, Daniel firstly relies on the infrastructure of the value chain, consisting of

¹⁶ Interview/conversation N.3. See Appendix II.

auction houses, intermediaries, in-between distribution platforms and supermarkets. Secondly, his financial profit depends on the bids made by intermediaries in the auction and thus the price supermarkets are willing to pay. As demonstrated in *Agroponiente's* reverse auction, the intermediaries are in the position to decide how much they offer, while the prices per kilo are decreasing per second. Thirdly, the prices that intermediaries pay for the products are contingent on the 'stock market' of fruit and vegetables. In this 'market' the value of products is continuously fluctuating according to global supply and demand. Although Daniel learnt all the practical skills to run a greenhouse from his dad, he argues that he still has to learn "how to anticipate the ever-changing market" and adapt to the unpredictability of prices.

The insecurity of the market price of agricultural products, and whether this price will exceed the production costs, poses a risk on producers while reinforcing the favourable bargaining position for retailers. Daniel explains: "For example, tomatoes are often sold at 30 cents (per kilo, in the auction houses) and in the *Mercadona* (Spanish supermarket) they are 150 cents (per kilo). The difference between these two places is many cents. In one kilo, you do not notice it, in a million kilos... 150 cents per kilo, that is 1.500.000 euros in one go. In a year, with 20 million kilos...you calculate. They earn all the money, but we take the risk."

Daniel adds that the unpredictability of weather and climate conditions is also a significant risk that he, as a producer, needs to take. Despite the industrialised and makeable aim of greenhouse production, agriculture is never completely malleable. Natural conditions like the season, weather and insect plagues inevitably affect the quality and quantity of production and therefore the global supply. While we stand in

the 'control room' where Daniel mechanically controls the conditions of his greenhouse, he states: "We (the farmers) take the risk of losing money. We are the ones that need to do the investments before earning something. We are the ones that have to deal with the plants if there are any problems. Their (the auction houses and cooperatives to which he sells his products) biggest problem is the shortage of supplies"¹⁷. This illustrates how, due to the globalised nature of Almerían agriculture, dependency and risks have become significant components of producers' profession.

The reduction of producers' margins, combined with the augmentation of global competition has resulted in "a race to the bottom" (Rye & Scott, 2018, p.936). In this complex interplay of global capital actors, producers aim to lower their production costs in order to reduce their financial risks and enlarge their benefits. Therefore, producers aimed for cheap and flexible labour. This demand for cheap and flexible labour in Almería's agricultural production is largely met by the extensive inflow of ir/regular labour migrants (Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Rye & Scott, 2018; Corrado, 2017; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014). However, this cost-cutting tendency of capitalism has resulted in a system of structural exploitation in which ir/regular migrants carry the burden to support the global provision of cheap fruit and vegetables.

4.2: 'A piece of the pie'

As the accumulation of capital results in unequal power dynamics and a subsequent 'race to the bottom', I will examine in subchapter 4.2. how ir/regular migrant labour is embedded in Almería's capitalist agri-industry. In paragraph 4.2.1, I start with exploring the reasons behind the large-scale

¹⁷ Interview/conversation N.3. See Appendix II.

recruitment of migrant labour in Almería's agriculture. Conceptualising migrant labour as 'transit labour', I argue that colonial legacies resonate in contemporary capitalist structures of power. In paragraph 4.2.2. I will continue with examining how migrants are employed in Almería's agriculture and elaborate on the different consequences of both informal and formal labour recruitment. I argue that, in the cost-cutting tendencies of global capitalism, migrants carry the burden for the maximisation of producers' financial benefits and the minimisation of their risks.

4.2.1. The engines of Almería's agriculture



"Welcome to this system of inequality and suffering" exclaims Spitou Mendy. He points with a wide arm gesture to the construction of a neighbourhood of gated villas on one hand, and to the vast sea of plastic greenhouses on the other. Spitou Mendy and I walk through Roquetas de Mar, a small town near El Ejido where he has been living for over twenty years. During these years, Spitou Mendy has worked different jobs in Almería's agriculture. Moreover, he was an active member of the labour union SOC-SAT to defend workers' rights and dignity. In his twenties, Spitou Mendy travelled from Senegal where he studied Spanish and taught in a secondary school to Spain. Inspired by his cousins, he arrived in Roquetas de Mar with the prospect of a salary that would enable him to support his family in Senegal. However, the reality he faced was different.

While sitting on a bench in the shade, Spitou Mendy shares the insights he has gathered over the past twenty years living the system. "All the people in agricultural production want to have their piece of the pie. [...] If producers do not lower [workers'] wages, they don't earn enough. But it is never enough. They always want more, more and more. [...] The system enforces that I die for their higher salaries. Thanks to the exploitation of migrants, Almería has been growing and farmers can buy their cars and build their villas. [...] This region needs manual labour and the system wants it to be cheap. [...] So in the end, we, the migrants, are the engines of Almería's countryside"¹⁸

Spitou Mendy's experiences and insights align with Samaddar's (2018; 2021) elaboration on mobile migrant labour in extractive industries contextualised in global capitalism. Samaddar argues that "contemporary capitalism utilises cheap labour, and makes use of the global supply chains,

¹⁸ Interview/conversation N.5. See Appendix II.

as never before” (2018, p.133). Samaddar (2018, p.134) conceptualises mobile migrant labour as transit labour: “labour transiting from one site to another, and from one form to another.” A characteristic feature of the migrant as a labouring subject is that they are not bound to one specific geographical location and therefore have the capacity to remain footloose. Samaddar (2021, p.24) refers to footloose labour migrants as “straddling two worlds – the world of citizenship they leave and the world of alienhood they move into. These two worlds do not present themselves to the migrants as mutually exclusive options. Instead, a new world appears marked by coming, moving further, going back, coming again, going elsewhere – always returning.” This makes transit labour a significant asset in the functioning of contemporary neoliberal economies. The informal conditions and the circulation of transit labour simplifies logistics and reduces the production costs (Samaddar 2018; 2021). Also, in ‘formal’, large-scale and centralised production systems, like Almería’s agriculture, cheap and informal labour is fundamental. Therefore, in capitalist economies, informal employment of transit labourers has become a necessity to ‘formal’ production systems to function: “the global now houses the informal within the formal” (Samaddar, 2021, p.111).

The configuration of Almería’s agriculture exemplifies Samaddar’s thesis. Characterised by Spitou Mendy as ‘the engines of Almería’s countryside’, ir/regular migrants who work in/formally in Almería’s agri-industry, are essential for the system to function. This statement aligns with multiple authors who have researched the tendencies of Almería’s agricultural system (Rye & Scott, 2018; Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014). Daniel

¹⁹, who produces tomatoes and watermelons, emphasises the widespread need for ‘hands’ in agricultural production. “They [migrant workers] are necessary. Let’s say, if it would be only me and my dad, we would never be able to run this production. It would be a problem. We are dependent on them [migrant workers]. But agriculture is just like that, it is never going to change”²⁰ Daniel’s statement demonstrates Almería’s dependency on migrant labourers. His remarks that “agriculture is just like that” and that it is “never going to change” thereby underlines that ‘extracting’ migrant labour is deeply ingrained in Almería’s capitalist production.

Samaddar (2021) highlights extractivism as the significant parallel between contemporary capitalism and colonialism. He argues that extractivism, of both natural- and human resources, was at the foundation of colonial rule: the colonial order was extractivist and capitalist, and the capitalist order could not have been implemented without colonialism. As Wolfe (2006, p.388) scrutinises: “colonialism is a structure, not an event.” Because extractivism was at the root of global capitalism, colonial legacies inevitably resonate in contemporary social, spatial and economic structures of power (Hage, 2016). Almería’s agriculture, founded on transit labour in a post-colonial capitalist order, exemplifies these ingrained unequal structures of power and the extractivism of human resources. Abdou, a Moroccan man who has been working in different greenhouses for three years, explicitly aligns his experiences in Almería’s agriculture with colonial power relations: “Basically, people treat us like slaves. We are diminished. We don’t mean anything to them, we are just workers.”²¹ Abdou’s reflection exemplifies the paradoxical position in which migrants, as labouring subjects of the post-colonial era, find themselves: they are

¹⁹ Introduced in paragraph 4.1.3.

²⁰ Interview/conversation N.3. See Appendix II.

²¹ Interview/conversation N.9. See Appendix II.

defined by their labour force and therefore an intrinsic part of global capitalist structures, but meanwhile excluded to fully participate in society because of their informal and ir/regular conditions.²²

4.2.2. The roundabout, Almería's most popular employment agency



In Almería, the in/formal conditions of transit labour are underlined by the large-scale recruitment of labour migrants on multiple roundabouts in the region. These roundabouts are referred to as “the most popular employment agencies of Almería.”²³ The following situation takes place on

²² I will further elaborate on how this paradox is institutionally imposed and experienced in chapter 5.

²³ Interview/conversation N.10;11;12. See Appendix II.

the roundabout *Hermanas del Niño Jesús* in the city of El Ejido. This roundabout is indicated as one of the most significant places to in/formally recruit labour in El Ejido.²⁴

It is still dark at *Hermanas del Niño Jesús*, but there is already a lot of movement around the roundabout. People arrive with scooters and bicycles and gather on pavements. Illuminated by a few streetlights, men and women wait in small groups, sitting or standing, being silent or talking softly in distinct languages. A group of women, wearing identical white aprons help each other applying their hairnets. One of them tells me that they will soon be picked up in a touring car that will bring them to the packaging plant where they are contracted.

Every time a van stops on the side of the roundabout, a group of people that has been waiting gathers around the car door. The door opens and within minutes and with minimal talking, a few of the group enter the van after which it drives away. Leaning against a wall, I meet Omar, Musa and Bakary, who will be picked up soon. They wear thick jumpers and the screens of their phones highlight their dark faces. For a few weeks, they are cutting bell peppers in a greenhouse nearby. Musa tells me that they don't have a contract, but that they rely on the oral agreement with their employer. They have to make sure that they are at exactly 6 a.m. at the roundabout to be picked up, otherwise the farmer will replace them with other workers. Currently it is low season: jobs are scarce. Shortly after our conversation, their employer arrives. Omar, Musa and Bakary enter his van and subsequently exit the roundabout towards the countryside.²⁵

²⁴ Interview/conversation N.8. See Appendix II.

²⁵ Interview/conversation N.15;16;17. See Appendix II.

The rising sun slowly reveals the contours of the buildings surrounding the roundabout. At the edge of the roundabout, I sit down next to a man with a beanie. We introduce ourselves to each other. His name is Ousmane. He is 43 years old and ran a shelter for orphans in Senegal but left his country just after his fourth kid was born. In a mix of French and Spanish, he asks me what I am doing here. Feeling like an intruder, I tell him about my research and return the question to him. “Buscar la vida” he responds. “Like everyone here.” I ask him what that means to him. “Finding a stable job, earning money, obtaining papers...build a life”²⁶ he explains. Ousmane tells me that he has been working different jobs for different employers lately, but only a few days at the time. He has cut watermelons, repaired roofs and cleaned greenhouses. However, he needs a more stable job. He needs to find an employer who wants to hire him full time. But today he is not going to find that anymore. The sun has already risen. It is time to go home.²⁷

The above situation illustrates how roundabouts have multiple functions with both a formal and informal character. Firstly, *Hermanas del Niño Jesús* serves as a pick-up point for formally employed workers, as exemplified by the group of women that is contracted at a packaging plant. Secondly, roundabouts are spaces where informally employed workers meet their employer, like Omar, Musa and Bakary. And thirdly, it serves as a place of recruitment, where informal supply and demand of labour potentially meet, as exemplified by Ousmane. Almeria’s agricultural industry encompasses an extensive infrastructure of formal labour employment, in which migrants are recruited and contracted through (transnational)

²⁶ Literally translated, ‘Buscar la vida’ means ‘searching for a life’. However, it is often used as ‘to make a living’ or ‘move on in life’.

²⁷ Interview/conversation N.1. See Appendix II.

recruitment agencies and employment brokers (Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014). Jose²⁸, the leader of Almeria’s labour union SOC-SAT explains that larger companies, like processing plants, frequently have formalised recruitment strategies and provide contracts to their workers. In this way, the supply of migrant labour is ‘channelled’ on a large scale to the places where there is demand for labouring ‘hands.’ However, formal and informal employment cannot be binary divided, as there are many in-between forms and phases that overlap (Kubal, 2013; Samaddar, 2021). Informal employment agreements might shift to formal agreements, or the other way around.²⁹

By informally employing labourers - and thus without formal contracts - producers can hire labour migrants for merely a few days and do not bear any legal responsibilities. Consequently, workers can be discharged easily. This results in labour easily “transiting from one site to another, and from one form to another” (Samaddar, 2018, p.134). This is explicitly exemplified by the way Ousmane, Omar, Musa and Bakary are making a living: as labouring subjects navigating themselves through Almería’s agriculture, they work temporarily for different producers where they do various types of jobs. One day they cut bell peppers for one employer, while the next day they repair roofs for another. In this way, they form a significant part of the ‘formal’ agricultural production that is significantly dependent on their ‘informal’ services (Samaddar, 2018; Samaddar, 2021; Rye & Scott, 2018; Corrado, 2017).

The informal recruitment and working conditions result in an increased flexibility for producers on one hand but produce precarity and insecurity for workers on the other (Rye & Scott, 2018; Corrado, 2017;

²⁸ Interview/conversation N.13. See Appendix II.

²⁹ More extensively elaborated on in chapter 5

Lindner & Kathmann, 2014). The absence of a stable income makes labour migrants' livelihoods precarious. Furthermore, the lack of employers' responsibility to comply with legally established working conditions reinforces exploitation and therefore the extraction of human resources. The built-in infrastructure of informal employment, fuelled by the cost-cutting tendencies of capitalism, therefore allows producers to maximise their financial benefits at the cost of migrants' social and financial security (Castles, 2006; Samaddar, 2018; Samaddar, 2021; Rye & Scott, 2018; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014).

4.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I unpacked how Almería's tomato production line unfolds in and beyond Almería and how in/formal migrant labour has become a significant asset in this globalised industry. Due to globalisation and the economical and spatial expansion of Almería's agriculture, transitory migrant labour has become a necessity to uphold the global demand for cheap fruits and vegetables. As a result of industrialisation and segmentation, Almería's agri-industry encompasses a multi-directional meshwork of interdependent actors who collectively enable the production, processing, distribution and sale of agricultural goods. Therefore, a plethora of actors comprise social networks by which im/mobilities of people, goods and capital are intrinsically entangled within Almería's agricultural production.

However, unequal power dynamics have emerged within these capitalised production networks. Fluctuating markets and increased global competition strengthened large retailers' bargaining position while enforcing producers' dependency and risk. This has resulted in 'a race to

the bottom' in which all capital actors aim to reduce their financial risk and enlarge their benefit. These cost-cutting tendencies have caused an increased demand for cheap, flexible and 'transitory' workers who have to deal with the risks instead.

Migrants have become the labouring subjects of Almería's extractivist industry and therefore 'the engines of Almería's countryside.' Characterised by informal conditions and transitory employment, transit labourers are a significant asset of Almería's formal production system. As a legacy of colonialism, migrants are enforced into a paradoxical position: they are integrated into 'formal' capitalist structures while being employed under informal conditions. Although Almería's agriculture also encompasses formal infrastructures of employment, informal employment is extensively present. This neo-liberal tendency, aimed at reducing risks and enlarging financial benefits, structurally reinforces the extraction of human resources. It fuels the exploitation of migrant labour, but systematically hides it under Almería's whitewashed roofs. In the next chapter, I will further delve into the juridical configurations that produce in/formality and ir/regularity.



5. Producing labourers

“Se hundan sus sueños	“Their dreams are sinking
Papeles mojados	Wet papers
Papeles sin dueño	Papers without an owner
Papeles mojados”	Wet papers”

In Chambao (2007), Papeles Mojados

As shown in the previous chapter, the ‘race to the bottom’ in Almería’s capitalist food production results in a demand for cheap and flexible labour, which is generally fulfilled by labour migrants coming to Almería to “buscar la vida.” In chapter 5, I will provide further insights into how Spanish regimes affect migrants’ labour- and mobility opportunities. I empirically show how these regimes are configured to produce ir/regularity. The chapter starts with a short outline of the most important regularisation procedures that serves as a guide through Spanish bureaucracy. In chapter 5.1., I will examine how labour migrants move in- and out of ir/regularity and what role ‘papeles’¹ have in their lived realities and future prospects. In subchapter 5.2. I will consecutively show how Spanish labour- and mobility regimes force migrants into a position of sub-existence, marked by ir/regularity, in/formality and precarity. These characteristics, in turn, prove to be key features in the functioning of the contemporary system of globalised food production.

A guide through Spanish bureaucracy

Acquiring a regular status in Spain, entails obtaining a residence permit. Colloquially, people refer to this permit as “papeles.” In the first two years, papers need to be annually revised. Subsequently they need revision after two and five years before being eligible for a nationality application. To acquire papers, migrants need to meet a plethora of requirements and collect an extensive number of documents from several institutions. Without a residence permit, people are not allowed to be formally contracted, but without a contract people are not eligible for a residence permit. In this info-box, I will summarise the most important exigencies as a guide through Spanish bureaucracy.

Empadronamiento

An *empadronamiento* is the population registration of the municipality. To register, a face-to-face appointment with the municipality to present a passport, housing contract and several municipality forms is required. Generally, it takes several months to arrange an appointment. After this appointment, the police will randomly visit the registered address to check whether the person applying is living at the address. When the person is not at home at this moment, the complete procedure will start over. Migrants indicated that they had to make multiple appointments before succeeding their registration. An *empadronamiento* is valid three months from issue.

Pruebas

Pruebas are evidence accrediting continuous residence in Spain for a minimum period of three years. During the three mandatory years of residing in Spain, migrants need to present documents for every three months. The type of documents can vary, with the requisite that they are retrieved from a formally recognized institution. Among other things, this can be a medical history, donations to the blood bank, money transfers, appointments with the consulate; the municipality; a NGO or other governmental institutions.

Labour contract

A labour contract with a minimum duration of one year is a strict necessity to apply for a residence permit. Frequently, an employee firstly works informally for an employer before being eligible for a labour contract. This juridical construction culminates in a direct relation between employment and legal status.

Figure 4: Info-box-regularisation procedures

5.1: “Perder los papeles”

In paragraph 5.1.1. I aim to unpack the significance migrants ascribe to ir/regularity and how ‘semi-legality’ affects their lived realities and prospects on the future. In 5.1.2., I will delve into migrants’ experiences with Spanish bureaucracy that inevitably affects their im/mobilities. Paragraph 5.1.3. explores how ir/regularity and in/formal employment are entangled in the regulatory realm. I subsequently demonstrate how this entanglement results in structural exploitation of labour migrants.

5.1.1. “Buscar la vida”



As explained in figure 4, migrants are not allowed to be contracted formally during the first three years in which they are irregularly in Spain. Because it is generally easy to get employed informally in Almería’s agriculture, migrants frequently come to the Plastic Sea to work informal jobs, generating the necessary income to eventually become ‘regular.’ Multiple ir/regular migrants³⁰ indicate that they came to Almería to obtain a labour contract and a regular status. Some of them intend to stay in Almería after having acquired papers and work formally in the agri-industry, others object to continue their trajectories to other cities and countries.³¹

In the logic of the nation-state migration apparatus (Dahinden, 2016), regularity implies the possibility of movement ‘within the boundaries of law’ (De Haas et al., 2020). The inclusion or exclusion from the law by means of a legal status, is perpetuated and reproduced through the mechanisms of the nation-state (Dahinden, 2016; Kubal, 2013). Accordingly, the possession of papers potentially enables people to cross nation-state borders, move freely, work formally, receive a stable income, invoke their (labour) rights, and make use of social services: it allows them to legally exist. Frequently, papers are perceived as a necessity to “buscar la vida” - to build a life and make a living.³² Also Malick, who I met on El Ejido’s roundabout, argues that obtaining papers was for him an essential step to ‘build a life’ and to further mobilise himself.

At dawn, Malick and I stand among dozens of workers who are silently waiting for an employer to pick them up. Malick wears a thick coat, a hat and a reflective bicycle jacket. In this hand he carries a plastic supermarket bag with a bottle of water and his helmet. Malick tells me that he recently

³⁰ Interview/conversation N.2;17;18;9;19;20. See Appendix II.

³¹ Interview/conversation N.1;2;6;9;17;18;19;20;21. See Appendix II.

³² As mentioned by Ousmane in 4.2.2.

obtained papers, which equals a regular status for one year. Despite the fact that Malick is contracted with a farmer, he came to the roundabout to generate some extra money to bring to Senegal. In a few weeks, Malick will visit his family after staying two years in Libya, followed by four years of irregular residency in Spain. I ask him whether things have changed for him after acquiring a regular status and a labour contract. “Employers have more respect for you when you have a contract. Your rights are written in black and white and therefore they cannot treat you like a dog” Malick tells. Pointing to the great number of people around us, all looking for work, he adds: “the security of an income is an important difference. Having papers means more freedom: you have more financial security and the freedom to go wherever you want.”³³

As stated by Malick, a regular status can signify multiple advantages in the realm of rights, security of livelihood and freedom of movement. However, as papers are valid for a limited period only³⁴, they merely indicate a temporal status quo. Consequently, migrants frequently move- in and out of legal statuses which results in shifting and temporal access to the above-mentioned rights and freedoms (Koser 2010; De Haas et al., 2020; Linder & Kathmann, 2014; Kubal, 2013). Several authors (Kubal, 2013; Koser, 2010; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Raulff, 2004) oppose binary conceptualisations of regularity and irregularity, as the ambiguity of regularisation procedures often results in various ‘in-between’-statuses. Kubal (2013) conceptualises these ‘in-between’ zones as ‘semi-legality.’ Aligned to semi-legality, Agamben (Raulff, 2004, p.614) extensively elaborates on “the hidden but

fundamental relationship between law and the absence of law” and defines the ‘in-between’- spaces as ‘the state of exception’. Agamben (Raulff, 2004) argues that exception and rule, and law and lawlessness, should not be perceived as ‘dichotomies’ but rather as ‘di-polarities’ because it is impossible to draw an absolute line between in- and outside the boundaries of law. This results in a continuum of “zones of undecidability and indifference” which significantly characterise the state of exception (Raulff, 2004, p.612). Despite the fluctuating character of legal statuses, ir/regularity does have great power on migrants’ lived realities (Koser, 2010; Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014) and inherently on their prospects of the future. Therefore, the significance of regularisation is frequently emphasised by migrants residing in Almeria.³⁵

Nadir aims to regularise but experiences a lot of difficulties in the Spanish bureaucracy. He has been waiting in Almería for a residence permit for over three years. Recently, his application has been rejected because his employer contracted him ‘unlawfully’. The bureaucratic complexity, the waiting and the intransparency of procedures frustrate him immensely. Driven by a lack of opportunities in Morocco for professional and personal growth, he decided to leave his country in 2013. Nadir travelled to Libya where he worked several years in an American company. He liked his life and work in Libya, but eventually had to flee for the threats of ISIS. Afterwards, he resided in Germany for a few years, moving from temporary asylum status to temporary asylum status. In 2018, he decided to come to Spain to do it “the right way” and apply for a residence permit that could provide him with a stable life. Overthinking all the paper borders he has yet

³³ Interview/conversation N.21. See Appendix II.

³⁴ As demonstrated in the info-box on Spanish migration procedures. Because it is Madadou’s first year of having a residence permit, his papers need to be revised after one year.

³⁵ Interview/conversation N.1;2;5;6;7;9;11;17;18;19;20;21;23. See Appendix II.

encountered, Nadir marvels about the power of papers and expresses his astonishment about it: “These papers are just pápers, you know. What does it mean? In the end it’s just a sheet costing a few cents...but they help you to start a life here, to find work. [...] If you are not working, you cannot live. Not here and not in another country. Papers help you start a life.”³⁶

The empirical accounts of Malick and Nadir establish an interesting dialogue with the statements of Kubal (2013), Koser (2010), Lindner & Kathmann (2014) and Agamben (Raulff, 2004) on the significance of ir/regularity. Despite the many ‘in-between’ zones of ir/regularity, Malick’s and Nadir’s statements indicate that regularisation still promises practical features like formal employment and free mobility throughout society and beyond borders. These features can signify (a sense of) freedom and fuels people’s hope for progress. Nadir’s and Malick’s vision on regularity also contains a prospect for a brighter future and generally an improvement in life. Accordingly, papers are frequently perceived as a key factor to broaden people’s horizon and to “buscar la vida.” Thus, although irregularity and regularity are not mutually exclusive categories (Kubal, 2013; Samaddar, 2021), the existence of these legal categories still resonates in the ways migrants aim to mobilise themselves and their futures.

5.1.2. “Shouwia shouwia”

Thus, papers are desirable documents as they can be a potential to progress. However, the procedures in Spain to arrange papers are considerably decentralised and untransparent.³⁷ In line with Corrado (2017, p.14) who describes Spanish labour migration regulations as “restrictive, complicated and inefficient”, migrants state that they often lack

information and guidance to navigate this bureaucratic maze. Accurate information on the procedures is hard to find and the instructions provided by governmental instances are mainly available in the Spanish language. This is frequently a complicating factor as many migrants did not have the time or resources to learn the language on a level to fully understand formal documents, which complicates the communication with governing institutions.³⁸ In the following situation, Souleymane, a 34 year old father of three from Senegal, has a consultation with social worker Alicia about his application for a residence permit.

On a sandy road in the middle of San Isidro’s plastic countryside, a group of people has gathered in front of Almeria Acoge’s day centre. A couple of young men, wearing brightly coloured football shirts, lean against the fence of the neighbouring greenhouse. A veiled woman with a wailing child walks back and forth, while sometimes peeking through the small window of the centres’ building. An elderly man hangs his washed clothes over his bicycle to dry in the sun. Many have wet t-shirts tied around their heads to protect themselves from the force of the Spanish sun. One by one, people enter the centre for a consultation on their migration procedure, to take a shower or do their laundry.

Inside the centre, a cacophony of voices echoes in the bare room with three tables with each two chairs. Souleymane, a tall man with soft eyes, sits down on the chair in front of Alicia and me. He takes out a pile of plastic folders from a small sports bag. The folders contain papers full of text and signatures. From his back pocket Souleymane takes his passport, showing that he is from Senegal, and puts it on the table. Souleymane

³⁶ Interview/conversation N.18. See Appendix II.

³⁷ Interview/conversation N.22. See Appendix II.

³⁸ Interview/conversation N.9;13. See Appendix II.

seems hurried but expectant. Today, he came to the centre of Almeria Acoge because it is exactly three years since he entered Spain, which means he can start the application for a residence permit.

In a mix of improvised Spanish and French, complemented by wide hand gestures and clear facial expressions, Alicia and Souleymane talk about the list of requisites for his application. “Do you know what you need in order to apply for a residence permit?” asks Alicia. “More or less, not completely...papers” responds Souleymane while his hands go through the papers on the table. “You need proof that you have been in Spain for the past three years, a labour contract and an *empadronamiento*.” explains Alicia. “Do you have these?” Alicia’s question fades away in the voices in the room and the sounds of washing machines. Souleymane shrugs his shoulders and remains silent for a while. In between his eyebrows appears a deep frown. “So much time, and I still have nothing”, Souleymane says while he puts a folder of papers fiercely down on the table. Alicia leans towards Souleymane and slightly touches his arm. “Let’s see what you’ve already got. You need patience, because there are a lot of things to do. And we have to wait, wait and wait.” - “Shouwia Shouwia”³⁹ sighs Souleymane gloomy, putting the folders back in his bag.⁴⁰

The above conversation illustrates the complexity of both the Spanish regulation policies and the subsequent communication to migrants about these procedures. The deficiency of accessible information in combination with Souleymane’s low language proficiency resulted in a lack of demanded documents, which will slow his application down. In her qualitative research among migrants in several EU countries, Kubal (2013) argues that

³⁹ To cope with the seemingly endless waiting times, “Shouwia Shouwia”, meaning ‘little by little’ in Arabic, has become a frequently used motto among migrants.

the lack of information on regularisation procedures often locks migrants in a status of semi-legality as their regularisation cannot be completed. She consecutively states that the absence of information was frequently caused by “the authorities’ interest in not popularising it” (Kubal, 2013, p.572).

In this way, resulting in a complex and slow bureaucratic maze, “many neoliberal regimes, which claim that law and order are the main features distinguishing them from others, actually engage in perpetuating the legally ambiguous modes of incorporation.” (Kubal, 2013, p.582) State policies thus intentionally produce juridical shadow zones, states of exception in which irregular migrants reside (Agamben, 2005). In accordance with Agamben’s conceptualisation of ‘the state of exception’ as “the existence of a realm of human activity not subject to law” (Humphreys, 2005, p. 678), Samaddar defines these ambiguous zones as “sub-existence” (2021, p.36). Sub-existence implies a condition of statelessness that cannot always be legally defined, because it mainly entails a lack of things: “the lack of facilities, lack of means of life and livelihood, lack of citizenship rights, and a lack of social entitlements, in short, a lack of all that nationality would imply. (Samaddar, 2021, p.36)

Firstly, people indicate that the experience of stuckness is caused by the impossibility of full participation in society, as referred to by Samaddar (2021) who elaborates on the predominant ‘lack’ of things in sub-existence. Due to their legal limbo, they cannot enrol in education, not work formally nor count on the police as a protective force.⁴¹ Nadir⁴², who has always been enterprising and enjoys being intellectually triggered,

⁴⁰ Interview/conversation N.23. See Appendix II.

⁴¹ Interview/conversation N.13. See Appendix II.

⁴² Introduced in 5.1.1.

summarises: “I feel like I don’t exist here.”⁴³ He explains that this feeling derives from the inability to ‘move on’, neither socially, intellectually or spatially.

Secondly, people feel stuck due to the indefiniteness of waiting. People indicate that the unknown timeframe to regularise and the minimal influence they have on their procedure makes the liminality harder to bear. Due to the structural exclusion from society and the indefinite waiting time people are at the mercy of the system that keeps them stuck in the same place. Nadir explains that the feeling of having to wait resonates in his daily activities and motivation: “I lose my time and life, just for these papers. [...] Every day I wake up, and I have no...no...what’s the word...purpose. I have nothing to do. I cannot think, I lose my things. [...] I cannot dream anymore.”⁴⁴ In this way, sub-existence can provoke profound feelings of stuckness that inevitably affect migrant’s wellbeing, motivations and prospects. This condition can be captured in the phrase “perder los papeles.” This Spanish proverb literally translates as “losing the papers” but figuratively means “to freak out or to lose oneself.” Because of the production of semi-legality and sub-existence in Almería, the literal and the figurative frequently appear hand in hand: people lose themselves through the absence of papers.

In the period of ‘waiting’ for their regulation procedure to succeed, and thus residing in a space of ‘sub-existence’, migrants need a job to generate a livelihood. Therefore, the majority of migrants who are ir/regularly residing in Almería, is forced into informal employment in its agricultural industry. In this way, the configuration of labour- and migration policies produces a footloose labour force that provides subaltern labour

but has been deprived from citizenship (Corrado, 2017; Rye & Scott, 2018; Samaddar, 2021; Samaddar, 2018).⁴⁵ Samaddar (2021) argues that the paradoxical linkage between ir/regularity and in/formal employment is intentionally implemented by labour- and mobility regimes in order to maintain the flexible and ‘transitory’ nature of migrant labour. This, in turn, is in favour of and inherent to the capitalist global mode of food production. In the next section, I will elaborate on how the configurations of these global macrostructures of capitalist production and mobility regulations are reflected in Almería's agricultural system.

5.1.3. “Todo es un negocio”⁴⁶

Feeling stuck or lost in a web of labour- and mobility regulations, many migrants find themselves in a vicious circle: to be eligible to be formally employed, people need a regular status. However, to obtain a regular status, a (one year) labour contract is a strict necessity. Therefore, it is all or nothing: not having a regular status means not working formally, but not having a labour contract implies not being eligible to obtain a regular status. This mechanism causes a widespread necessity for labour contracts, as these are perceived as a ticket to regularity.

The extensive demand for labour contracts results in migrants’ dependency on employers who are in the position to provide them this ‘ticket to regularity.’ This mechanism of supply and demand provokes unequal power dynamics between employers and migrant employees. Employers can make use of migrants’ urgency to obtain a labour contract whereas migrants find themselves in a vulnerable position dictated by the necessity for a contract. Consequently, a booming business of labour

⁴³ Interview/conversation N.18. See Appendix II.

⁴⁴ Interview/conversation N.18. See Appendix II.

⁴⁵ As elaborated on in 4.2.1.

⁴⁶ Meaning ‘Everything is a business’

contracts flourishes in Almeria, in which labour contracts are wanted and commodified goods.

“Todo es un negocio” says José, an experienced social worker of Almeria Acoge. Although it is officially prohibited, the lucrative business in labour contracts is widespread in Almeria and therefore completely normalised. “People can obtain documents through the legal way or by buying them” states José,⁴⁷⁴⁸ the leader of the labour union who identifies many cases of exploitation and deceit through the commodification of labour contracts. Samir, a young Moroccan activist who refused to pay his employer 9000 euros for a contract and now remains irregular and unemployed, is bitter about the system: “To acquire papers you first need a contract, a job. But free contracts are impossible to find.”⁴⁹ The majority of workers I spoke with indicated to have paid between 3000 and 9000 euros for a labour contract.⁵⁰ To be able to pay these high amounts of money, they needed to save up for years. Many were working informally while returning a share of their wages to their employer at the expectation to eventually receive a contract. In this way, formal migrant employment exists by the grace of informal employment as this is a means to become regular. This construction and its impact on the people that are subjected to it shows the overlapping, shifting and fuzzy ‘boundaries of law’ determining migrants’ ir/regular statuses (Kubal 2013).

The configurations of Spanish labour- and mobility regimes, in which regularity and formal employment are directly linked, thus produces a precarious labour force. This allows capitalist actors to accumulate their capital through extractivism as an ingrained structure of colonialism

⁴⁷ Introduced in chapter 4.2.2.

⁴⁸ Interview/conversation N.13. See Appendix II.

⁴⁹ Interview/conversation N.19. See Appendix II.

(Samaddar, 2018; 2021; Mezzadra, 2011). The semi-justified business of labour contracts marks the extractivist nature of migrant labour in Almeria’s agriculture. At the same time, it shows how migrants, as labouring subjects, have become part of capital itself that is generated and accumulated in the globally embedded food production chain. In such a manner, Almeria’s agricultural industry, being embedded in global capitalism, makes everyone a market enabled actor, though unequally (Samaddar, 2021).

The powerful position of farmers - in relation to their migrant employees - within Almeria’s value chain is thus the result of configurations of labour- and mobility regulations. These regulations, in turn, facilitate the global capitalist for cheap and flexible labourers. Daniel,⁵¹ being a key asset in Almeria’s agricultural production, states to charge money for labour contracts to cover service costs and to ensure that migrants will remain working for him. While we are talking in the heat of his plastic greenhouse, he explains: “People come from Morocco, from Africa or elsewhere and they come to Spain... they have nothing. They come illegally. So, what they want is to be legal. So, what they need is a labour contract to obtain papers. [...] But what happens? When you give them a contract, they acquire papers and leave. Well, I want the person to stay and work. In this way, when they leave, they themselves will lose their money and not me. [...] I don’t want to take the risk of providing them a regular status and ending up empty-handed.”⁵²

Daniel argues that the fee for the labour contract is destined to ‘service costs’ and buys him security of labour. However, as stated by Maria, Almeria Acoge’s lawyer, both contracting and regularising migrants

⁵⁰ Interview/conversation N.2;9;11;18;19;21;28;29;30;31. See Appendix II.

⁵¹ Introduced in chapter 4.1.3.

⁵² Interview/conversation N.3. See Appendix II.

is almost free.⁵³ The ‘service costs’ Daniel is talking about therefore do not exist. However, through Daniel’s juridically ascribed power to provide migrants a labour contract, he can still require them to pay. In this sense, labour contracts have become an instrument of control and exploitation. Moreover, several migrants claim to have bought labour contracts but never received them. Therefore, they have both lost their savings and the qualification to apply for a residence permit.⁵⁴ Said, a man in his twenties from Senegal wearing a wide sport shirt with glittery headphones on it, found himself in this scenario.

In a small office in the day centre of Almeria Acoge, I listen from a side-table to a conversation between Said and Maria, the lawyer of Almeria Acoge. They are sitting in front of each other, separated by a small desk and a transparent covid-screen. The airco softly buzzes in the background and provides a chilly breeze. Said sits on the edge of his chair and talks with a voice full of anger and indignation. “He promised to give me a contract. We worked together for more than three years. I trusted him...I have paid him all the money he asked for.” Said has completed three years of waiting, has a valid *empadronamiento* and has collected sufficient *pruebas* that are neatly organised in a folder in front of him. He meets all the requirements, except for having a labour contract. With his employer, with whom he collaborated informally the past three years, he made an agreement. Said would receive a labour contract on the condition that, during the three years of informal collaboration, he would relinquish part of his salary. However, he did not receive a labour contract. On the contrary, from the moment Said had completed the three years, his employer ignored him and

⁵³ Interview/conversation N.22. See Appendix II.

⁵⁴ Interview/conversation N.9;16;18;25. See Appendix II.

he was not welcome to work anymore. “My boss says it is because I have no papers, but I have had no papers for three years and I was always allowed to work.” His loud voice echoes in the room. Maria concentratedly documents Said’s testimony and reassures him “It is not your fault what happened. You are a human being, and you have rights. We are going to try to fix this.”⁵⁵

Cases like Said’s are not rare. When migrants are not regularised, and thus lack citizenship rights, it is complicated to sue an employer when not fulfilling informal agreements. Migrants with an irregular status legally don’t ‘exist’ in Spain and are thus not allowed to work. This complicates invoking their rights. Therefore, the juridical conditions in the spaces of sub-existence and semi-legality make migrants less resilient to exploitation.



⁵⁵ Interview/conversation N.25. See Appendix II.

5.2: The shadows of the Plastic Sea

As exemplified by Said's situation, who found himself in a space of sub-existence and was therefore vulnerable for deceit and exploitation, I will examine in subchapter 5.2. how ir/regularity produces precarity. The configurations of the Spanish labour- and mobility regime structurally produce ir/regularity which proves fruitful for the creation of a precarious and in/formal migrant workforce. In paragraph 5.2.1., I will demonstrate how ir/regularity affects migrants' working conditions. I show how migrants find themselves on a crossroad of capitalist labour demand and deprived citizenship which results in an employment system based on fear. Consecutively, in paragraph 5.2.2. I will further examine how migrants' precarity resonates in various realms of their lived realities, which excludes them spatially, socially and economically, being reflected in 'a fourth world.'

5.2.1. A system of fear

Thus, ir/regularity and in/formal employment are inherently linked as a labour contract is a precondition for regularity. Although working formally can be advantageous to several aspects, the working conditions and wages are not rather different between formal and informal employment (Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmaan, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; Lopez-Sala, 2016). José, the leader of the SOC-SAT states: "Having documents allows many things that those who are irregular don't have: being able to rent a house, having a stable job... but the economic conditions don't change. They still get paid around 5 euros an hour, which



is around 40 euros a day, while they work Monday to Sunday without any vacation-days.”⁵⁶

Based on the following two situations, I will illustrate the precarious position migrant workers find themselves in, regardless of the in/formal character of their employment. The first situation involves two Bulgarian men working informally. The second situation concerns a group of migrant workers that have been working formally for twenty years with the same employer.

Next to San Isidro’s roundabout, two men, both middle-aged with grey beards, are smoking a cigarette and drinking a cup of coffee. In the parking lot, the roof of their car serves as a coffee table. The sun is not yet up and the traces of sleep are still in the men’s faces. Being the odd one out, as a blond, young woman on the roundabout at this hour, I draw the men’s attention. They offer me a cup of coffee, which I of course cannot refuse.

The men are Andrei and Filip from Bulgaria. They have been living in San Isidro for a long time but are currently not contracted. To generate some income, they made a verbal agreement with a previous employer to cut watermelons the coming week. Soon, he will pick them up. Within a few sips of coffee, a large van with a trailer full of wheelbarrows arrives. Andrei and Filip put out their cigarettes and quickly knock back their cups of coffee. They raise their hand to the young, tall man that comes hurriedly out of the van. Filip walks up to the man but soon returns. Filip and Andrei exchange some words in their native language and light another cigarette leaning against their car. I ask them when they will leave for the job. They reply that they will not. The farmer does not need them anymore, he hired

some others. In silence, Andrei and Filip smoke their cigarettes with big puffs and get into the car. Back home, no work today.⁵⁷

The situation of Andrei and Filip illustrates the uncertainty of being employed informally and thereby the replaceability of clandestine migrant labour (Corrado, 2017; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; Rye & Scott, 2018). The replaceability of migrant labour links to the footloose nature of transit labour, which can be transited easily from one place to the other (Samaddar, 2021; Samaddar 2018). Or, like the case of Filip and Andrei, even be completely eliminated. In this way, Spain’s regulatory framework produces an asymmetry between power and responsibility regarding employers. Furthermore, it forces migrants, being labouring subjects, on a crossroad of capitalist labour demand and deprived citizenship. As the agreement between Andrei and Filip and their employer was verbal and informal, there were no labour rights nor evidence of the convention to rely on. Legally, the employer did not have any responsibility towards Andrei and Filip. Although hiring labourers informally risks employers a 12.000 euro fine per irregular employee,⁵⁸ the benefits of a flexible and informal labour force - due to a lack of legal responsibilities and costs for social security - often predominate among employers (Samaddar, 2021; Kubal, 2013; Rye & Scott, 2018; Corrado, 2017, Lindner & Kathmann, 2014).

As a contrast, the next situation describes how a group of formally employed migrants invoke their labour rights when their employer is not keeping the agreements made.

⁵⁶ Interview/conversation N.13. See Appendix II.

⁵⁷ Interview/conversation N.26;27. See Appendix II.

⁵⁸ Interview/conversation N.3;22. See Appendix II.

The sun has not risen yet when we gather at an empty gas station in the middle of Nijar's plastic landscape. Chadiyah, Hanifa, Farah, Karima and Ramzi greet José,⁵⁹ when they get out of their car. Today they have organised a protest to defend their labour rights. For years, their employer has been treating them badly. All of them have been contracted by the same agricultural company for ten to twenty years. Depending on the season, they pick tomatoes, harvest watermelons and sow peppers. Their job provides them an income and a regular status, but the working conditions are harsh: they are shouted at, hounded, timed to go to the toilet, prevented from drinking water and not allowed to open a window to get rid of the stifling greenhouse heat.⁶⁰ The conditions are poor and stressful and their employer authoritarian and oppressive. "He is full of lies. He treats us like dogs" tells Farah,⁶¹ on our way to the greenhouse.

The straw that broke the camel's back was the employers' request to sign a labour contract stating that they should 'voluntarily' take four months of unpaid 'holiday' during the low season. Their labour contracts state nothing about these 'holidays' and they need these four months of income to provide for their families. They did not sign the contract and started a strike. Despite the agreement in their labour contracts, their employer fired them and replaced them with temporary informal labourers from Sub-Saharan Africa and Romania. "These men just work and keep their mouths shut. That is what he needs." tells Farah, angry.

Having arrived at the greenhouse where they worked, two headlights of a van illuminate the group of protesters: the greenhouse-owner has arrived. José and Chadiyah walk forward and try to start a conversation, but the greenhouse-owner refuses. He gets out of the car,

makes some aggressive hand gestures, takes a few pictures and disappears under a plastic roof. This battle has to be fought in court.



Although the group of formally employed labourers did have labour rights to rely on, the compliance with these rights was still not self-evident: their working conditions were poor and their employer tried to undermine their rights for his own economic profit. To oppose their employer took bravery and eventually cost the employees their jobs as the collaboration with the employer did not function anymore after the confrontation.⁶² Abdul, a social worker of the labour union, describes this mechanism as 'the system of fear.' He explains that there is a widespread fear among migrant workers

⁵⁹ Leader of labour Union SOC-SAT. Introduced in chapter 4.2.2.

⁶⁰ Interview/conversation N.29. See Appendix II.

⁶¹ Interview/conversation N.30. See Appendix II.

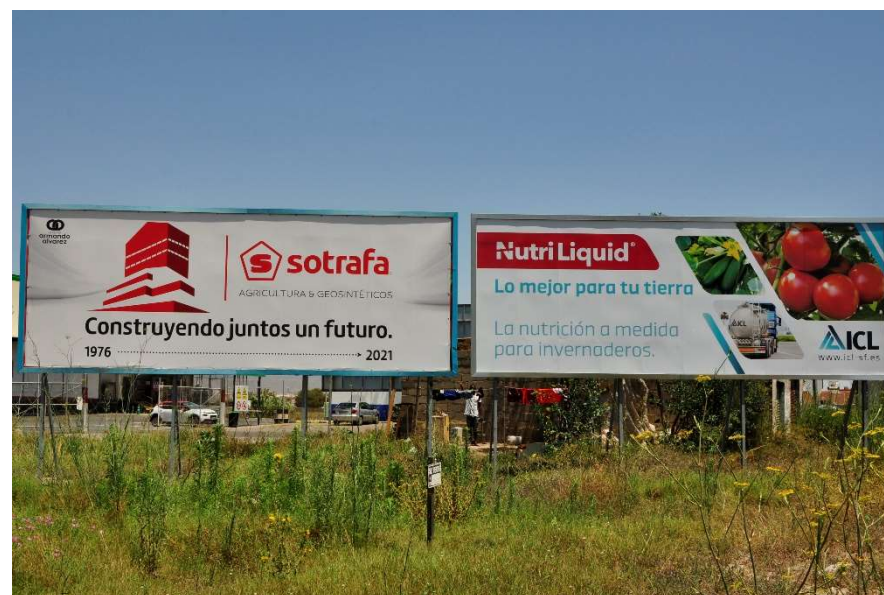
⁶² Interview/conversation N.28. See Appendix II.

to be fired or replaced as a labour contract is perceived as the ticket to the desired regularisation. The threat of dismissal or replacement makes migrants reluctant to oppose their employer and to invoke their rights. Hence, they are kept in a system of poor working conditions for low salaries.⁶³

This mechanism of structural disempowerment in Spanish agriculture is described by multiple authors (Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al. 2014; Rye & Scott, 2018; Lopez-Sala et al., 2016) and illustrates that, even when having a regular status, migrants can find themselves in an exceptional position of juridical sub-existence (Kubal, 2013; Samaddar, 2020; Samaddar, 2018; Agamben, 2005). Kubal (2013, p. 579) emphasises that the notion of semi-legality “challenges the overwhelming power and importance of one’s formal legal immigration status, and the popular belief that once the legal status is ascertained, access to rights and justice will automatically follow.” The subversion of rights and justice is illustrated by the cases described above. In both situations, migrants’ labour- and citizenship rights are undermined by the configuration of the capitalist system in which the employer is rather powerful than responsible. Hence, the interplay of Spanish migration policies and global capitalism has produced a mechanism that maintains employers’ power and migrants’ precarity: the rule of force remains dominating the rule of law (Hage, 2016). This consequently has resulted in a ‘system of fear’.

⁶³ Interview/conversation N.7. See Appendix II.

5.2.2. The fourth world



This ‘crossroad of capitalist labour demand and deprived citizenship’ results in migrants’ precarious position in society. Several participants⁶⁴ explained that they feel ‘reduced to merely their hands’ instead of being acknowledged as a participating civilian. This tendency links to the conclusion that Castles (2006) draws in his article on guestworker recruitment in Europe. In his analysis, he argues that “the EU and its Member States seem still to be trying to import labour but not people” (Castles 2006, p.761). In this manner, migrants’ existence as human beings is diminished to their ability to pick tomatoes, cut watermelons and sow peppers. Although migrant labour is the backbone of Almeria’s agricultural

⁶⁴ Interview/conversation N.2;5;9;11;15;17;18;19;21;23;26;27. See Appendix II.

industry, the people comprising this labour are made invisible (Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al. 2014; Rye & Scott, 2018; Lopez-Sala et al., 2016). Khalifa, a Senegalese activist, living and working in Almeria for over twenty years, underlines the hypocrisy of this phenomenon: “Why does nobody talk about the migrants that are working in the countryside? If there were no migrant workers in the greenhouses, the tomatoes would not arrive in the warehouses and the trucks full of vegetables would not travel [...]. If agriculture is the engine of Almeria’s economy, migrants are the necessary fuel.”⁶⁵

The exclusionist mechanism of reducing migrants to merely labour and therefore making them invisible as human beings, prevents them from fully participating in society (Castles, 2006; Rye & Scott, 2018; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; Samaddar, 2021). Invisibility, as a characteristic of sub-existence, results in the appearance of a certain ‘shadow society’ in which migrants are segregated from ‘the rest’ of the population. Samaddar (2021, p.115) emphasises the paradox of migrants’ ‘functionality’ within the capitalist system and their invisibility in the societal realm of the countries hosting them. He states that migrants, as labouring subjects, are “made to work as per the requirements of the global supply chains of commodities and labour; on the other hand, they must remain invisible from the public eye.” Spitou Mendy,⁶⁶ overlooking the newly built villas next to the plastic sea of exploitation, explains: “We have come from the third world and now have built the fourth world next to the first world. In the shanty towns of Nijar, Atochaes, El Ejido... In Almeria’s

countryside, we have built a separate village. A nameless village full of replaceable workers.”⁶⁷

The construction of a fourth world, due to exclusion and segregation of Almeria’s migrant population, illustrates the production of sub-existence and exception. These spaces encompass different realms of society. Firstly, migrants often live spatially distant from ‘the rest’ of the population. Due to the low wages migrants generally receive in agriculture, many reside in self-constructed shantytowns or perished cottages. Electricity and running water are the exception rather than the rule. Samaddar (2021) points out the similarities between these shantytowns of expulsion and colonies in the nineteenth century. He conceptualises these intentionally concealed ‘camps’ as “territories of mobile labour, since they hold at one place an enormous amount of reserve labour” (Samaddar, 2021, p.107). In this way, the fourth world is located neither inside or outside society which perpetuates the availability of a flexible pool of migrant labour but undermines migrants’ integration into society.

Secondly, irregularity implies the exclusion from many social services like formal housing, formal employment and education (Kubal, 2013; Castles, 2006; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Rye & Scott, 2018). Regardless of their legal status, migrants often indicate that it is difficult to fully integrate and to be hired in other places than in agriculture or ‘low skilled’ jobs. Enrolling in education is complicated as the certificates obtained in the countries of origin are often not valid in Spain. Spitou Mendy, who has multiple diplomas but is still reliant on merely manual labour in Spain, comments: “When I want to integrate, they tell me: your

⁶⁵ Interview/conversation N.11. See Appendix II.

⁶⁶ Introduced in chapter 4.2.1.

⁶⁷ Interview/conversation N.5. See Appendix II.

diplomas are not valid. [...] According to white people, I don't have a brain, I'm just a worker. I have to fight to get 900 euros to support myself: pay for a house, pay the bills... and who benefits from it? The system. [...] This system here does not recognise people, this system only recognises capital and money.”⁶⁸ Talking about ‘the system’, Spitou Mendy refers to the mechanisms of global capitalism and the agricultural industry. The expulsion from society, due to the paradoxical - but seemingly intentional - interplay of these infrastructures (Castles, 2006; Samaddar, 2021), fuels profound frustration among Spitou Mendy and many others in similar situations.

Thirdly, migrants state to frequently feel exceptionalised and are discriminated against by the local, white population and the police.⁶⁹ Maria,⁷⁰ states that “Generally, the police are racist. There are a few who properly follow the protocols, but the majority disadvantages migrants.”⁷¹ She states that migrants should be extra careful as they live ‘outside the law’. Maria’s observation demonstrates the tensional field between ‘law and the absence of law’ as described by Agamben (Raulff, 2004; Agamben, 2005). The following situation of Hassan, an irregular Moroccan migrant, illustrates the ‘state of exception’ and how this affects migrants’ lived realities.

Hassan sits in front of Maria in her small but cool office. With his head bowed and his hands constantly picking at a loose thread from his T-shirt, Hassan explains what happened recently. On an evening in June, Hassan got drunk and had an encounter with the police. After this encounter, the police seized Hassan's passport with the consequence that

he has to report to the police every month. In addition, proceedings have been started against Hassan, which will most certainly lead to his expulsion from Spain. As a result, he will not have access to Spanish territory for a minimum of three years and the waiting period for his residence permit will be diminished. While Hassan tells his story in a desperate and soft voice, Maria nods her head sporadically and listens attentively. After Hassan has told all the details, she sighs and tells with an empathic but clear voice “We cannot do anything.” Hassan remains silent. Tears fill his eyes. After Hassan has left the office, Maria explains that drunkenness is generally a minor offence, but that the combination with an irregular status or “having a different colour” can be fatal when the police have harmful intentions. “Migrants live under different laws, and generally the consequences are always harsher.”⁷²

The police, as an executive power of the state that should enforce the law, is in this situation the perpetuator of the exceptional state of sub-existence in which migrants are positioned. Regardless of their legal status, migrants feel exceptionalised and moreover harmed by both the local population and the sovereign power. This exemplifies the condition of semi-legality and underlines how one’s legal status does not ascertain the access to rights and justice (Kubal, 2013) nor the integration into society (Samaddar, 2021). The expulsion, caused by and as a result of migrants’ semi-legal status, reinforces their precarious position in society. Hence, Spanish migration policies produce ir/regularity and precarity through the institutional positioning of migrants as labouring subjects.

⁶⁸ Interview/conversation N.5. See Appendix II.

⁶⁹ Interview/conversation N.2;5;9;11;18;19;20. See Appendix II.

⁷⁰ The lawyer of Almeria Acoge. Introduced in chapter 5.1.3.

⁷¹ Interview/conversation N.22. See Appendix II.

⁷² Interview/conversation N.33. See Appendix II.

5.3. Conclusion

The overall complexity and intransparency of Spanish regularisation procedures results in juridical shadow zones, which are defined by Kubal (2013) as semi-legality, by Agamben (Raulff, 2004; Agamben, 2005) as the 'state of exception' and by Samaddar (2021) as sub-existence. By perpetuating legally ambiguous modes of regularisation, state policies intentionally produce ir/regularity which results in a predominant lack of 'all that nationality would imply.' These shadow zones show that regularity and irregularity cannot be binary divided as the ambiguity of regularisation results in 'in-between' statuses. However, although irregularity and regularity are not mutually exclusive categories (Kubal, 2013; Samaddar, 2021), the existence of these legal categories still resonates in the ways migrants aim to mobilise themselves and their futures. Migrants often envisioned 'regularisation' as a primary foundation to 'buscar la vida.'

Fuelled by hopes and prospects to amplify their professional and personal horizons, migrants therefore aim to regularise. Nonetheless, due to the juridical linkage between regularisation and employment, migrants frequently get 'stuck' in informal employment in Almería's agricultural industry. In this way, labour- and mobility regimes produce an informal transit labour force that provides subaltern labour but has been deprived from 'everything citizenship would imply.' The production of this flexible and cheap migrant labour force is in favour of and inherent to the capitalist global mode of food production. This tendency underlines how the entanglement between the im/mobilities of people and goods within Almería's capitalised value chain exposes a second entanglement of labour and mobility in Spain's regulatory realm.

The entanglement between Spanish labour- and mobility regulations, together comprising infrastructures of control, results in 'a system of fear' while creating a sub-existing 'fourth world.' Marked by

informality and precarity, migrants are institutionally forced on a crossroad of capitalist labour demand and deprived citizenship. These regulatory entanglements result in systematic exploitation in order to sustain Almería's globally embedded capitalist value chain. As the capitalist order is a colonial order, migrants - being 'the engines of the countryside' - are positioned as the postcolonial, labouring subjects of Almería's agriculture.



6. “Winds do not blow as the ships desire”

تجري الرياح بما لا تشتهي السفن
“Winds do not blow as the ships desire”

This popular Arab proverb was brought up by Basima.⁷³ Portraying herself as the ship, this motto helps her to accept that external conditions (the winds) will indisputably change the course of her trajectory. Being the ship, she depends on the ever-changing force of the wind while navigating the sea. Sometimes she is subject to storms, while other times she has the wind at her back. Alternating between movement and stasis, she navigates her routes throughout the dynamics of Almería’s agricultural industry.

In this chapter, I will describe how migrants navigate ir/regularity and their ways throughout controlling infrastructures. In 6.1., I will empirically demonstrate the interplay between infrastructures of control and infrastructures of autonomy. I do this by giving an in-depth description and analysis of Abdou’s mobility trajectory. In chapter 6.2., I will subsequently highlight the essential role of in/formal social platforms, conceptualised as migration industries, in order to challenge infrastructures of control which results in the autonomy on migration.

6.1: ‘Zigzagging’ throughout the laws

“The law, you have to...” Antonio finishes his sentence with a zigzagging movement with his hands to illustrate his statement. As a social worker of Almeria Acoge, Antonio has observed plenty of strategies by which

ir/regular migrants “deal with”, undermine and overcome the restrictions imposed on them by law. In this subchapter, I will show in 6.1.1. how migrants continuously challenge infrastructures of control by finding alternative ways of mobilisation and employment. I conceptualise this tendency as the ‘autonomy of migration’. Subsequently, I will explore in paragraph 6.1.2. how the transitory character of migrant labour affects the autonomy of migration. I argue that labour and mobility regimes both compel and allow migrants to transit between different jobs and places.

6.1.1. Abdou



⁷³ Interview/conversation N.2. See Appendix II.

In the previous chapters, I have described how the entanglement of Spanish mobility- and labour regulations result in an infrastructure that restricts migrants' rights, security of livelihood and social- and spatial mobility. Accordingly, ir/regular migrants' often find themselves in a space of sub-existence (Samaddar, 2021; 2018) and semi-legality (Kubal, 2013). Although Samaddar (2021, p.34) describes sub-existence on the one hand as "a grey zone [...] causing maximum dispossession", Kubal (2013, p.555) argues that semi-legality also represents "a multidimensional space where migrants' formal relationships with the state interact with their various forms of agency toward the law." In line with Kubal (2013), Mezzadra (2010) and Samaddar (2021) emphasise that it is too one-sided to portray ir/regularity as a mere state of victimhood and repression. They point out that the 'politics of control', by which they refer to mobility- and labour regimes that produce ir/regularity, inevitably stirs a 'politics of migration'. This aligns with Koser (2010) and Corrado (2017) who demonstrate that limited opportunities to regularly cross borders and informal employment fuels irregular migration. This means that the production of ir/regularity should not be merely conceptualised as "a unilateral process of exclusion and domination managed by state and law, but as a tense and conflict-driven process, in which subjective movements and struggles of migration are an active and fundamental factor" (Mezzadra, 2010, p.1).

To bring attention to these struggles, Schapendonk & Steel (2014, p.262) emphasise the relevance of gaining "in-depth insights into how migration trajectories are produced, facilitated, slowed down and blocked." Therefore, I will highlight the mobility trajectory of Abdou⁷⁴ to demonstrate how the controlling grids of the Spanish-European labour- and migration regime affect his mobility and employment experiences.

⁷⁴ Introduced in chapter 4.2.1.

Although Abdou's trajectory, including the encounters and events that have shaped it, is unique, the obstructions and facilitations he has experienced resonate with many others. His story therefore represents and exemplifies the experiences of a larger group of participants.

Abdou is a Moroccan man of 34 years old. He speaks English and Spanish fluently which he learned by watching *The Simpsons*. Growing up in Tetouan, a city in the north of Morocco, Abdou aimed to leave Morocco from a young age already. In the interview two weeks after our first encounter, he tells me in detail why and how he left Morocco to eventually arrive in Almeria. Together with Nadir, a friend of Abdou who also participates in the interview, we sit in a small office of Almeria Acoge. Leaning back in his chair with his hands resting on his flowery t-shirt, Abdou tells: "In Morocco there is no chance to do anything with your life, there is nothing in Morocco. If you see how life is right now in Morocco, you will be shocked. There are too many people and nothing to do. There are no jobs, literally no jobs."

Therefore, Abdou left Tetouan. In a convincing voice, he explains: "I grew up with the idea 'when I am capable, I am out of here. When I have the chance, I will leave.'" Being educated as an electrician, he left Tetouan and resided in several Moroccan cities where he was "changing jobs". He did some work as an electrician, was a fisher and rented water skis. When he was twenty-six years old and had saved money, he decided that it was time to leave Morocco. Abdou entered Spanish territory through the city of Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in the North of Morocco. However, Ceuta did not promise the opportunities Abdou had in mind. He wanted to reach the Spanish mainland, which is only forty kilometres from Ceuta but separated

by the Strait of Gibraltar. However, these forty kilometres proved difficult to bridge without a European passport or valid papers. “I had many chances to leave, but I was caught at the frontier by the police of Spain and three or four times by the police of Morocco. It was not my first attempt, every year I tried. [...] I tried like 8 times before this one (the attempt by which he succeeded to reach the Spanish mainland).” In the meantime, Abdou worked different jobs in Ceuta to generate an income and save money to pay the smugglers for his next attempt.

In his last and successful attempt, Abdou was assigned as the captain of the boat, and describes how he narrowly escaped death in a near collision with a container ship. “I came in a small boat, not a regular one. It was me and twelve others. [...] For me this was a very bad experience. I was the captain, so I was responsible for all the lives in this small boat. We had to cross the routes of these big ships, these containerships. We had to cross between them. At one point, the engine of our boat stopped working. I have never been so scared as in that moment. Because I knew, these big boats cannot change direction so fast. It takes like fifteen to twenty minutes to change the direction slightly. So, our engine stopped while we were on the line of one of these boats. We were...powerless. And practically dead. Luckily, I had this problem before with a boat and I was able to restart the engine. I have never been so happy. Even now I feel it again” Abdou tells, while he stares at the table in front of us. Nadir and I remain silent, not finding the words to respond to what Abdou just told us. Abdou breaks the silence and starts laughing. “Imagine, big men with beards, crying. Yes, it was good the engine started again, but these five minutes felt like five days.”⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Interview/conversation N.9. See Appendix II.

This first part of Abdou’s mobility trajectory shows how social immobility and financial shortage in Morocco were driving forces for him to leave, which corresponds with the driving force of multiple other migrants.⁷⁶ Mobilising himself to and from different cities in Morocco were acts to escape the precarious conditions he found himself in. However, at the border, in his multiple attempts to reach the Spanish mainland, his mobility was blocked by the coastal police as he did not have a European passport nor valid documents to cross the border. Van Houtum (2010) refers to the restrictive policies to cross EU’s external borders as the fortification of the European Union (EU) which significantly shapes the im/mobilities for migrants originating from outside the EU. Because of the EU’s fortification, Abdou was obstructed and therefore experienced an extensive period of stuckness. This shows how mobility and immobility cannot be theorised as separate opposites, but are relational forces (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schapendonk, 2018; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010; Adey, 2006). Abdou’s phases of immobility, in which he resided in different Moroccan cities and in Ceuta enabled him to save money by “changing jobs” and to find smugglers that could facilitate his border crossing. In this way, he eventually could irregularly cross the strait of Gibraltar, reach the Spanish mainland and thus mobilise himself.

Finding and applying alternative ways to achieve personal objectives, like Abdou did, is an act of autonomy. Papadopoulos et al. (2008) define the autonomy of migration as a social movement by which migration is understood as migrants’ creative force to navigate themselves throughout social, cultural and economic infrastructures established by both migration and labour regimes. By inventing alternative routes,

⁷⁶ Interview/conversation N.1;2;5;6;9;11;14;15;16;17;18;19;20;21;23;25;26;27;28;29;30;31;32. See Appendix II.

migrants alter the grids of control (Mezzadra, 2010; Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007; Papadopoulos et al., 2008). Samaddar (2021) argues that ir/regularity, marked by informality and precarity, results in migrants' collective efforts to change these conditions and therefore in the autonomy of migration. As previously described,⁷⁷ these conditions result in migrants' footloose state of existence, which allows them to transit between jobs and places and find innovative ways of mobilisation. Therefore, Samaddar (2021, p. 119) refers to the autonomy of migration as "the willingness and the capability of migrants to move from one condition to another, one job to another, one economic situation to another, and one economy to another." In this way, the willingness and capability to achieve his personal objectives resulted in Abdou's transitory labour and mobilisation strategies.

6.1.2. Abdou's network

In challenging the governing infrastructures, and thus 'the politics of control', Abdou is an active actor in a conflict driven interplay between control and autonomy. In the next section I will further demonstrate how the transitory nature of ir/regular migrants enhances migrants' flexibility and therefore the autonomy of migration. I will illustrate this by describing the continuation of Abdou's mobility trajectory.

Having reached the 'real Spain' at the harbour city Algeciras, Abdou sank the boat as instructed by the smugglers and swam to the mainland. "I could not leave any traces for the coastguards. If they find the boat there, they will watch that place the next time." Abdou stayed for around a week in

Algeciras, where he quickly got to know some people that were willing to help him. "When Moroccan people see another Moroccan who just arrived, they will help this person in any way they can. [...] They have lived that situation before, so they know. It is expected from you that you will do the same when you meet someone in the same situation. It is like a vow." Via Malaga, where Abdou stayed for a mere week, he travelled to Barcelona. "I had my uncle there. [...] I stayed there for three months." During these three months, Abdou worked sporadically, but the intensive police controls made it difficult to find a job. "I worked, but not much. It is hard to work there because there is so many police, so much control. They do not let immigrants work without papers. I worked like ten days in three months and made around five hundred euros."

In the office of Almeria Acoge, Abdou sighs and brushes his hands through his hair. "Then it was enough. I was thinking of going to Germany, but I did not have any friends there. I did not have so much money, around eight hundred euros savings. I started thinking...when I go there [to Germany], I don't know anyone and the language is too hard. Then, friends from Morocco told me 'Come here, come here, come to Almeria to work.' I did not know this place nor this kind of work. I had never worked in agriculture. So, when they told me 'Here is a good job, you can earn some money', I went. When I arrived there, I told them 'You didn't tell me you work in this kind of environment.'" Abdou detested the work in the greenhouses as the conditions were harsh and his wage low. Therefore, he left Almería as soon as he had the chance. "I stayed with my friends for twenty days, worked a bit, and then decided to leave for Mallorca."

⁷⁷ See chapters 4.2.1; 5.1.2; 5.2.1 & 5.3. The term footloose refers to Samaddar's (2021) usage of the word. This does not necessarily imply freedom and ease of

movement, but moreover the capacity and need to transit from one place to the other.

Abdou lived in Mallorca for four months, but again, it was hard to find jobs where he could be employed without documents. In total, he worked around one and a half weeks informally in construction sites. However, the frequent police controls made him scared and uncomfortable. “You are always hiding. When you see police cars, you hide. You go to a nearby cafe or something. And when they are gone, you go back to work.” As it was easier to be informally employed in Almeria, Abdou needed the money and wanted to regularise, he returned. “So, I went back to Almeria. [...] I learned that when you want to work in Spain, you have to get your papers right. Nobody likes their jobs here. But we have to do it. Fifty to sixty percent⁷⁸ of the people leave this place [Almeria] once they have their papers. [...] So I said to myself ‘I am going to stay here. I am going to try to get papers here in Almeria. Then I will be free to travel without having to worry about being caught by the police.’”⁷⁹

Simultaneously with entering Spanish territory, Abdou entered a space of sub-existence and semi-legality. By crossing the Moroccan-Spanish border ir/regularly, he was deprived of his legal status. This position is marked by the multiple encounters with, or threats by, the police. The necessity to hide demonstrates how invisibility is inherent to the functionality of migrant labour (Corrado, 2017; Lindner & Kathmann, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al. 2014; Rye & Scott, 2018; Lopez-Sala et al., 2016, Samaddar, 2021). Samaddar (2021), Mezzadra (2010) and Kubal (2013) show how the police is a state force and thus the executive power of labour- and migration regimes. The police aimed to control Abdou’s movements and his labour activities which compelled him to find alternative routes. In this way, by

means of smugglers and other actors, he challenged the regime of control. The collective effort of all actors involved in the facilitation of Abdou’s mobilisations results in the autonomy of migration.

The interplay between autonomy of migration and (supra-)national regimes of control consists of Abdou both circumventing and using these infrastructures. Firstly, the fact that Abdou sank the boat in front of the coast of Algeciras exemplifies how he undermines the Spanish-European securitised migration regime. Removing the traces of his arrival, as instructed by the smugglers, demonstrates how informal migration networks collectively circumvent the regulatory structures and thus facilitate mobility.

Secondly, due to Abdou’s irregular status, it was difficult to get employed in Barcelona and Mallorca. His imposed “lack of facilities, lack of means of life and livelihood and lack of citizenship rights” (Samaddar, 2021, p.36) obstructed his social and spatial mobility. At one point, Abdou recalls ‘it was enough.’ From the precarious conditions Abdou found himself in, emerged the necessity to leave Barcelona and move on. ‘Being footloose’ as a transitory labouring subject thus puts migrants in a paradoxical position, which simultaneously obliges and enables them to remain flexible and innovative in their movements. This tendency aligns with Samaddar’s (2021) linkage between transit labour and the autonomy of migration: the infrastructures of control both compel and allow migrants to transit between different jobs and places and to mobilise in alternative manners.

The paradox between structure and agency and control and autonomy, is reflected in Abdou’s step to return to Almeria. Abdou had a great aversion to the agricultural work in Almeria but was channelled to go

⁷⁸ These percentages are not verified.

⁷⁹ Interview/conversation N.9. See Appendix II.

back by the lack of other opportunities to generate an income and obtain papers. This illustrates how Abdou ‘moves’ himself throughout both infrastructures of control and autonomy: Configured by means of labour- and mobility regulations, Almería’s agriculture can be conceptualised as an infrastructure of control. Abdou’s ir/regular mobilisations, on the contrary, are facilitated by means of in/formal actors encompassing infrastructures of autonomy. He needs both infrastructures, including informal exploitative labour, to meet his personal objectives. As Abdou states “Nobody likes their jobs here. But we have to do it.”

Samaddar (2021) argues that under the conditions of subjection, precarity and informality, migrants’ collective resilience emerges. He states that “Marked by degraded work, controlled by market rules and compulsions, tied to the obligations of supply chains, subjected to low and a differential wage system, and unregulated labour regimes characterised by violence – it is amidst this set of conditions that migration as a socio-economic and political practice realises its autonomy.” (Samaddar, 2021, p.121) He continues that ir/regular migrant labour is inherently linked to exploitation. Exploitation, as a social process, “is grounded in the entire migratory process and experience” (Samaddar, 2021, p.121) but always confronted with migrants’ agency.

Currently, Abdou has been in Spain for over three years, is enrolled in the Spanish migration procedure and has obtained a labour contract which will enable him to soon regularise. In a WhatsApp message, he tells me that he had to illegally buy this labour contract, which underlines the exploitation he is subjected to. It moreover shows how irregularity and regularity continuously overlap, as he is forced into an irregular action - buying a labour contract - to regularise. On WhatsApp he writes: “Yes, almost everybody has to pay, so I saved money to buy one [a contract].” After a three-year period of immobility in Almeria, Abdou will probably be

mobilised again due to his regularisation. His next objective is to go to Paris where he will live and work with an uncle. In this way, by the continuous adaptation to changing circumstances and utilising and circumventing regulations, Abdou's mobilisations were part of an autonomous force of migration.

6.2: Socially navigating migration industries

In subchapter 6.2, I examine how the emergence of different types of in/formal social platforms affect the autonomy of migration. In paragraph 6.2.1., I will conceptualise these ensembles of actors and actions that both facilitate and control migrants’ mobility, as migration industries. I subsequently explore how these so-called ‘relational force fields’ shape migrants’ trajectories. In paragraph 6.2.2., I show how migration industries are dynamic and networked entities that migrants need to navigate by means of social negotiation. I demonstrate how in/formal migration industries, emerging from the necessity for alternative migration routes, are at the core of the autonomy of migration.

6.2.1. Follow the social contacts

Throughout Abdou’s mobility trajectory, his personal objectives and desires were fuelling the willingness and capability to socially and spatially ‘move on’. To mobilise himself and achieve his objectives, Abdou needed to ‘follow the money’ and transit between different places to generate income. Living and working as a ‘footloose labouring subject’ Abdou’s mobility trajectory proves to be a dynamic process in which he continuously adapts to the situations he encounters that re-orient his routes and subsequent destinations.

Schapendonk (2018, p.665) elaborates on the intrinsic interplay between migrants' individual desires and other (f)actors that constitute migrant trajectories' dynamic character. He argues that "Although individual decision-making is relevant in this context, migration trajectories cannot be explained by focusing solely on migrant agency as a form of autonomous power. In fact, the evolvment of individual pathways depends so much on social networks, brokering services, helping hands, un/expected encounters and policy interventions." Deriving from this perspective, migrants' trajectories can be fuelled by agency, but cannot be separated from the given context and other (f)actors involved. Among others, Schapendonk (2018) refers to the overall conjunction of different (f)actors facilitating and controlling migrant mobility as the 'migration industry'. Several authors (Schapendonk, 2018; Cranston et al., 2018; Ingold, 2011) emphasise the relational dimension of migration industries, in which the interconnectivity between different actors and roles is central to the functioning. Therefore, Ingold (2011, p.93) addresses the complex web of all (f)actors that encompass both the facilitation and control of mobility as a 'force field of relationalities.' This means that the migration industry can be perceived as a socially networked entity, in which actors, objectives, goals and relations continuously shift which, in turn, affects migrants' trajectories.

The evolvment of Abdou's trajectory was contingent on multiple, spatially scattered (social) actors that he related to. Abdou's migration trajectory exemplifies the trajectories of other migrants.⁸⁰ Crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, Abdou was first controlled by restrictive infrastructures and therefore depended on smugglers who provided him with the means

⁸⁰ Interview/conversation N.1;9;14;15;16;18;20;23. See Appendix II.

⁸¹ Interview/conversation N.1;2;5;6;9;14;15;16;17;18;19;20;21;25;26;27. See Appendix II.

to 'deal with' this obstruction; in Algeciras he relied on the mutual solidarity of other migrants to re-mobilise himself; Abdou moved to Barcelona because his uncle lived there and provided him shelter and contacts for employment; his friends introduced and invited him to come to Almeria to work in agriculture; Abdou refrained from travelling to Germany because he explicitly did not have any social contacts there; and eventually returned to Almeria where he had already established contact with employers for whom he could work again. Also, his future objectives and destination, after he has obtained his residence permit, are based on the familial contacts he has in Paris.

All the (social) f/actors Abdou relied on to mobilise himself mediated and thus affected his mobility and employment. The plethora of different forms and functions of these f/actors, show the variety of people and actions migration industries entail. Some were controlling, like the (paper) borders Abdou had to cross. Others were facilitative like the smugglers who helped him to mobilise and the friends and acquaintances who provided information, shelter and contacts for employment. As exemplified by Abdou and verified by multiple other participants,⁸¹ mobilisation and employment frequently go hand in hand. Many people are not bound to one specific place and state to transit easily to places where they can find a job, make a living and thus 'buscar la vida'⁸²

Ousmane⁸³, who left Senegal to generate more income for his family, explains how he always 'follows the money'. Therefore, employment opportunities were a significant guideline in the course of his trajectory. After having arrived in Spain, Ousmane tried to work informally

⁸² Interview/conversation

N.1;2;5;6;9;11;13;14;15;16;17;18;19;20;21;23;25;26;29;30;33. See Appendix II.

⁸³ Introduced in Chapter 4.2.2.

in Roquetas⁸⁴ which proved to be difficult. Adapting to this disappointment, he decided to move to El Ejido where it was, according to his uncle who had been living there for several years, easy to be employed without papers. However, Ousmane frequently emphasises that, also in El Ejido, it is necessary to “know people” in order to be employed. “Having contacts is very important. People can help you find a job. If you do not have contacts, you do not work. Then you can just stay in your bed.”⁸⁵ Ousmane says laughingly.

In this way, “following the money” also entails “following the social contacts” that can be scattered in different places. Some parts of migration industries function informally, and consist of family, in/direct friends and acquaintances, as exemplified by Abdou’s facilitative social contacts. Other social actors are more integrated into formalised infrastructures of mobilisation and employment and consist of (transnational) recruitment agencies and employment brokers (Findlay & McCollum, 2013; Agunias, 2009; Corrado, 2017). However, the boundaries of formality and informality cannot be binary divided (Samaddar, 2021; Kubal, 2013). As exemplified in previous chapters,⁸⁶ migrants also use informal structures of employment to create a network of social relations to eventually get employed formally. This is demonstrated by Ousmane, who argues that roundabouts, previously described as “the most popular employment agencies of the region”⁸⁷ serve to expand his network to eventually find an employer who might offer him a formal labour contract. Hence, roundabouts can be conceptualised as informal networking platforms. These spaces provide the opportunity to create a ‘social fibre’ which might enlarge the opportunity of getting employed in/formally. Ousmane

⁸⁴ A village in the agricultural region around El Ejido.

⁸⁵ Interview/conversation N.1. See Appendix II.

explains: “Once you have worked for multiple bosses and they like how you work, they will remember you. Later, if they need hands, they will call you first to work for them. Maybe later they can even give you a contract.”

As becomes evident from Ousmane’s strategies, social networks are not fixed and pre-established entities. For Ousmane, it requires effort and investment to create a network of employers, colleagues and fellow migrants on which his employment, and potential mobilisations, rely. This proactive attitude to build social networks and create contacts underlines the criticism towards static conceptualisations of social networks in migration studies. Deriving from Bourdieu’s (1986) theorisation on social capital, Schapendonk (2015, p.809) pleads for an approach to social networks that “recognises the changeable nature of networks and the social endeavours that are needed to accumulate social capital.” In the next paragraph, I will elaborate on migrants’ efforts and strategies to establish social networks that can facilitate further mobilisation.

6.2.2. “Abre la boca”

The changeable configurations of migration industries show that social networks are not self-evident nor static but require migrants’ proactive attempts to be established. In moving away from so-called ‘network determinism’, social networks can be therefore conceptualised as the products of social efforts which take shape in the act of *networking* (Schapendonk, 2015). This ‘networking work’ (Pathirage and Collyer, 2011; Schapendonk, 2015; Schapendonk, 2018) refers to migrants’ ‘social negotiations’ in which they “mobilise social connections in such way that it helps them to achieve personal objectives” (Schapendonk, 2018, p. 666).

⁸⁶ See chapter 4.2.2.

⁸⁷ As elaborated on in Chapter 4.2.2.

Putting effort in establishing social relations that might be personally valuable is both a practice of individual and collective agency. Migrants, being individual agents, can decide what relationships they engage in. Nonetheless, the term 'negotiation' inherently implies that the act involves multiple actors. Hence, establishing and expanding social connectivity, and thus socially negotiating, is not entirely in the control of migrants themselves but is moreover a relational effort to navigate migration industries (Schapendonk, 2015; Vigh, 2009). Vigh (2009) argues that 'moving' - both socially, spatially and economically - throughout migration industries can be captured in the term 'social navigation.' He proposes this term as an "alternative perspective on the intersection between agency, social forces and change." Therefore, beside migrants' personal endeavours, it aims to include the interplay between "the social environments of actors, actants, individuals and institutions." (Vigh, 2009, p.419)

To illustrate how migrants can navigate themselves throughout the ever-changing contexts of facilitative/obstructive regulatory infrastructures, in/formal employment opportunities, ir/regular mobilisations and the plethora of social actors, I will describe the career of Mohamed and his corresponding mobilisations.

Mohamed and I meet on the terrace of cafe 'Avenida' next to San Isidro's roundabout. Mohamed is a forty-year-old man from Mali with an open gaze. He laughs frequently and is eager to tell me about his transnational wanderings between jobs and places. During our conversation, it is siesta time, so the traffic on the roundabout is busy. Workers in reflecting vests pass by on their bicycles to go home for lunch and the sound of vans

sporadically overwhelms our conversation. Leaning forward over the terrace table, Mohamed tells. In 2013, Mohamed left Mali, explaining that "When your country doesn't offer you the opportunities you are looking for, you have to leave and find them elsewhere." Through acquaintances, he heard about Almeria and decided to go there "to buscar la vida" - make a living to sustain his mother and fiancé in Mali.

Arriving in San Isidro, Mohamed did not have any documents and needed to work informally to generate his livelihood. Despite only knowing a few acquaintances in San Isidro, he states that he has always had the 'luck' finding the right people that could help him. He exemplifies this by an accidental encounter with his first employer. Standing in the queue at the local bank where he wanted to transfer money to his family, he greeted an older lady. She smiled back and they started a conversation. Mohamed indicated that he just arrived in San Isidro and was looking for a job. She told him she owned two greenhouses and was soon looking for employees to work in the harvest season. They got along well and exchanged numbers. Within a few weeks, Mohamed worked informally for the lady, while he could live in a house for which she paid half of the monthly rent. "She was the best person that I could have met. She helped me in many ways." In 2016, after collaborating three years informally, his employer offered him a labour contract which enabled Mohamed to regularise and to visit his family in Mali.

Returning from a few months visit to Mali, Mohamed was informed by a former colleague to work a seasonal job in Jaen⁸⁸, where he picked olives. However, the job was temporary and Mohamed was looking for something to do afterwards. A friend who also worked at the farm in Jaen advised him about the agency *Terra Fecundis*, a formal employment broker,

⁸⁸ An agricultural region in the inlands of Spain.

that transnationally connects employers and employees. With his CV and papers, Mohamed went to the office of *Terra Fecundis* and within a few weeks, Mohamed found himself on a farm near Toulouse, France. In Toulouse he worked for a French farmer and picked grapes. Again, Mohamed was lucky and got on well with his boss and his colleagues with whom he collaborated for nearly two years. However, Mohamed had to return to Almeria for the revision of his residence permit. This is the status quo at the moment we meet. Currently he resides in San Isidro where he refers to as 'his village in Spain' to which he always seems to return. To earn some money and save for another visit to Mali, Mohamed daily commutes to a temporary job in Murcia that he found through a previous employer in Almeria. Within a few months, after his papers will be revised, Mohamed hopes to be able to work formally for his employer in Toulouse.

Answering the question where he would like to be in both the near- and far future, Mohamed shrugs his shoulders. "I will see where life takes me. If I do not succeed in Spain, I will try my luck somewhere else. I will go to France, Germany or the Netherlands. You must have faith in the path you take." Although Mohamed strongly believes in the path *Allah* has paved for him, he emphasises the importance of "Abre la boca", which means "to open your mouth" and thus the act of communicating his own needs and desires to others. He convincingly argues that you must inform as many people as possible about what you need. "You have to open your mouth and make contact with the people around you. They can help you achieve your objectives." He clarifies his statement by a metaphor: "When you are in pain, you have to inform a doctor before he can cure you. When you don't talk to others about your needs, nobody will know and nobody will be able to help."⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Interview/conversation N.6. See Appendix II.

Mohamed's life motto "Abre la boca" is characteristic for his proactive attitude in perpetuating social relationships that are possibly relevant to him. The successes of his social investments are, however, not only dependent on his own efforts but also on the intentions of the actors he aims to connect with. The significance of relationality, which Mohamed describes as 'luck', is exemplified by the lady who Mohamed randomly met. In this situation, they both had an interest in the newly established relationship. This underlines the relational aspect of social networks and the interdependency of social relations (Schapendonk, 2018; 2015, Vigh, 2009, Ingold, 2011; Cranston et al, 2018). However, this 'win-win' situation did only emerge because Mohamed 'opened his mouth' and communicated his needs to the lady. Establishing and maintaining this relationship became a key feature for the course of his trajectory. As he recalls "She was the best person that I could have met."

Mohamed's career shows how migrant trajectories are paved throughout a complex web of "diverse actors with shifting roles" (Schapendonk, 2018, p.664). Mohamed describes himself as 'lucky' and mainly highlighted the actors that have facilitated his mobility and employment. However, it should be emphasised that migration industries and migrants' navigation throughout these 'relational force fields' (Ingold, 2011) do not merely consist of 'helping hands.' This is exemplified by the role of employers,⁹⁰ who abuse their key role in migrants' regularisation by selling labour contracts. Furthermore, shifting legal statuses, unstable

⁹⁰ See chapter 5.1.3.

employment configurations,⁹¹ and changing social relationships are defining the institutional- and social maze that migrants continually need to navigate. Mohamed's strategies show how cultivating relationships with the 'right' people prove fruitful to socially navigate the migration industry. In his strategy, the openness towards new opportunities, as exemplified by his mindset "I will see where life takes me", and his proactive attitude "abre la boca" resulted in the achievement of his personal objectives by means of in/formal migration industries. From the relationality and circulation within migration industries, in turn, emerges a collective movement that enables the circumvention of regulatory infrastructures. This countermovement embodies the autonomy of migration.



⁹¹ As elaborately described in chapter 5.

6.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how infrastructures of autonomy interplay with infrastructures of control throughout migrant trajectories. In doing this, I have shown the essential function of migration industries. In/formal migration industries emerge from the collective effort to challenge labour- and mobility regulations, which results in the autonomy of migration. Compelled by sub-existence, migrants continuously need to (re-)negotiate their relationship with the state, law and ever-changing social networks that prove to be necessary in the course of their trajectories. This exemplifies how the production of ir/regularity is not merely a process of subjection and victimhood, but a conflict-driven interplay between restriction and circumvention. This dialectic demonstrates a third layer of entanglement between Almería's value chain and labour migrants' im/mobilities: the inherent entanglement of control and autonomy.

The evolvement of Abdou's mobility trajectory provided insights into how migrants' trajectories include both obstruction and facilitation of mobility by various f/actors. Abdou socially navigated different and ever-changing infrastructures of in/formal migration facilitation- and control. He therefore is an individual agent, but simultaneously depends on a plethora of other f/actors. Migrants' capability and willingness to transit between jobs and places and the proactive attitude to (re-)create valuable social networks are at the core of their autonomy of migration. Therefore, migration industries are relational fields that migrants socially navigate, in which social connections are key features for the evolvement of their trajectories.

However, the flexibility of labour that is needed to socially navigate this relational field, puts migrants in a paradoxical position. The infrastructures of control that reinforce transit labour allow and compel migrants to find alternative ways for mobilisation. Analysing the autonomy of migration thus captures two sides of the same coin. On one side, it demonstrates its emergence from migrants' necessity to (re-)negotiate their relation to the infrastructures of control. On the other side, it encompasses the ways in which these structures are challenged. This friction between autonomy and control therefore reflects how migrants 'zigzag' throughout both the infrastructures of control and facilitation. The proverb "winds do not blow as the ships desire" therefore also illustrates how collective agency of migrants, symbolised by the winds, counters the pre-established routes of the ships: the grids of control.



7. Conclusion

In this concluding chapter I will revisit the theoretical foundation and the empirical findings of this research and bring them together. In chapter 7.1. I will scrutinise my empirical findings and thereby answer the main- and sub-questions of this research. Subsequently, in 7.2. I will link the empirical findings of this research to broader academic debates on im/mobilities, value chains, ir/regularity and the autonomy of migration. I will do this by means of the conceptual model of ‘a global roundabout.’ In sub-chapter 7.3., I will reflect on the boundaries of this research and propose several recommendations for future research. Sub-chapter 7.4. encompasses suggestions for the operationalisation and implementation of the findings of this research towards more humane policies concerning labour- and mobility.

7.1. Synthesis: entangled im/mobilities in postcolonial capitalism

In this research I aimed to 1) gain empirical insights into the entanglements of the im/mobilities of ir/regular labour migrants and the im/mobilities of agricultural products comprising Almería’s agricultural production and 2) unpack how these interdependent im/mobilities are shaped by regulatory infrastructures of control and in/formal migration industries to 3) detect how the tension field between mobility- facilitation and obstruction causes a constant dialectic between regimes of control and the autonomy of migration. I did this by conducting qualitative research among various actors involving Almería’s agricultural industry.

To further operationalise this objective, I have used the following research question:

How do im/mobilities of ir/regular labour migrants, employed in Almería’s agricultural industry, entangle with the im/mobilities of the agricultural goods they produce?

This question has served as the theoretical lens of this research. To answer my main question and gain deeper understanding in the different entanglements within Almería’s agricultural production, I have divided it into three sub-questions that I have answered respectively in empirical chapter 4, 5 and 6. Each empirical chapter comprises a different dimension of ‘entanglement’ within Almería’s globally embedded, agricultural industry.

In chapter 4, I have investigated how migrant labour is embedded in Almería’s globalised agricultural industry and demonstrated how global capitalism has fuelled the expansion and industrialisation of Almería’s production. From the angle of different actors involved in Almería’s agriculture, I have researched the mutual dependencies between distinct segments of production. The focus on the relationality between different actors has demonstrated how Almería’s global value chain comprises a fluid and interrelated network of social relations. This results in a globally embedded and capital-driven system of entangled im/mobilities of labour migrants and agricultural products. Unpacking these entanglements has shown how in/formal and transitory migrant labour is at the backbone of Almería’s capitalist value chain, while in/formal employment in agriculture is frequently a ‘common thread’ in labour migrants’ mobility trajectories.

In chapter 5, I aimed to give an empirical understanding of the ways in which regulatory infrastructures produce 'ir/regularity' among labour migrants which consequently affects their im/mobilities. Building on the inherent dependency between the im/mobilities of labour migrants and the im/mobilities of agricultural products they produce, I show how labour and mobility are also entangled in the regulatory realm. The interplay between labour- and mobility regimes, together comprising infrastructures of control, produces ir/regularity and creates spaces of 'sub-existence.' Marked by ir/regularity, informality and precarity, migrants are institutionally channelled into a crossroad of capitalist labour demand and deprived citizenship. These regulatory entanglements result in the production of a transitory, in/formal migrant labour force that is subject to the cost-cutting and extractivist tendencies of globally embedded capitalist value chains. As the capitalist order is a colonial order, migrants, being 'the engines of the countryside', are positioned as the postcolonial, labouring subjects of Almería's agriculture.

In chapter 6, I unpacked how regimes of control and infrastructures of autonomy interplay in migrants' mobility trajectories. I delved into the ways in which ir/regularity affects labour migrants' lived realities, employments and im/mobilities. Consequently, I highlighted how the production of ir/regularity is not a mere process of subjection, but is inevitably confronted with migrants' collective efforts to challenge and circumvent the grids of control. By means of social negotiation, fluid and in/formal social networks emerge that facilitate alternative ways of mobilisation, and therefore reinforce the autonomy of migration. This results in a cat-and-mouse game of restriction and circumvention. The continuous dialectic between infrastructures of control and autonomy implies how also these infrastructures are inherently entangled in shaping labour migrants' mobility trajectories in Almería's agricultural production.

All in all, this qualitative research has detected three interlinked dimensions of 'entanglement' concerning the involvement of migrant labour in Almería's agricultural industry. These entanglements entail: the intrinsic dependency of im/mobilities of agricultural products and labour migrants; the interplay between labour- and mobility regimes; and the dialectic between control and autonomy. Focusing on the multiple levels of entanglement unpacks the mutual interdependencies and therefore the power dynamics that are at play on Almería's 'global roundabout.' This, in turn, helps to excavate the 'politics of mobility' that are at the foundation of Almería's agricultural production. As empirically demonstrated, Almería's 'global roundabout' - the overall mechanism that transnationally regulates the supply and demand of agricultural labour and products - produces 'slow and fast lanes.' Analysing these three layers of entanglement by means of the 'global roundabout', exposes the deeply ingrained colonial relation between capitalism and extractivism. Therefore, the contemporary regulatory configurations to supply capitalist labour demand by reinforcing ir/regularity underline how global im/mobilities are inherently political and subject to the overarching force of postcolonial capitalism.

7.2. Almería's 'global roundabout': link to academic debates

In this section, I will relate my empirical findings with the academic debates on im/mobilities, value chains, ir/regularity and the autonomy of migration. I will do this by referring to the conceptual model of a 'global

roundabout.⁹² Unravelling the different layers of entanglement shows how an analytical focus on entanglements can deepen our understanding of the configurations and driving forces of global im/mobilities.

Deriving from the mobilities turn (Sheller & Urry, 2006, Cresswell, 2010; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013), this research has taken the im/mobilities of people, goods and capital as points of departure. In the model of the roundabout, these im/mobilities are indicated by the moving (and intersecting) arrows. Unravelling how mobility trajectories are “produced, facilitated, slowed down and blocked” (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014, p.263), sheds light on the infrastructures that selectively regulate global im/mobilities (Cresswell, 2010; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2006). This is visualised in the image of the regulatory structure of the roundabout. By gaining individual accounts of individuals who revolve around Almería’s agricultural production, I included a variety of perspectives on Almería’s agricultural production. This allowed me to gain understanding into the complex interplay between the im/mobilities of people and goods, signified by the intersections of the arrows. Thus, the arrows and the structure of the roundabout together comprise the configurations of Almería’s agricultural value chain.

Lepawsky & Mather (2011) argue that value chains exist by the grace of multidirectional social networks of actors and actions. Therefore, the inclusion of multiple perspectives has allowed me to “identify the synergies and frictions at play” (Schapendonk, 2018, p.676). This enabled me to expose how “the miracle of Almería” (Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014), encompassing the industrialisation, segmentation and capitalisation of Almería’s agriculture (Rye & Scott, 2018; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014) has commodified the relations between the actors in

the industry. As a result, the ‘miracle’ of Almería has produced significant power imbalances between different actors of the production chain, in which large retailers reap the fruits while labour migrants and producers carry the burden. This tendency has fuelled the employment of an extensive, global labour force. The inherent entanglements of the increased global distributions of agricultural products and the augmented influx of labour migrants’ marks the relationality of im/mobilities of people, goods and capital as elaborately described by Sheller & Urry (2006), Law (2004), Cresswell (2010) and Adey (2006).

Portraying capitalised value chains as fluid meshworks of im/mobilities debunks static and sedentary notions of globalised production networks (Glick & Salazar, 2013; Sheller & Urry, 2006) However, the infrastructure of Almería’s ‘global roundabout’ illustrates that stasis is also a prerequisite of movement. Almería’s ‘global roundabout’, comprising the conjunction of different segments, is therefore an infrastructural mooring as conceptualised by Urry (2003). In line with multiple conceptualisations on im/mobilities (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010; Adey, 2006), my findings therefore underline that mobility and immobility should not be categorised as binary opposites, but moreover as relational forces.

Im/mobility dynamics of people and products are regulated by labour- and mobility regimes, imposing “the boundaries of law” (De Haas, 2020). These infrastructures of control, in turn, produce spaces of semi-legality (Kubal, 2013) and sub-existence (Samaddar, 2021). The roundabout is embedded in infrastructures of control but simultaneously crossing them, as demonstrated by the red grids. This makes spaces of sub-

⁹² See Appendix VI for the en

existence ambiguous zones of ir/regularity and in/formality. The ir/regularity of labour migrants and the in/formality of their labour makes them vulnerable for structural exploitation by Almería's capitalist value chain. Consequently, ir/regularity results in two dialectic forces. On the one hand, the force that aims to control and exploit migrants' im/mobilities and labour. On the other hand is the force that counters these tendencies, captured in the term of the 'autonomy of migration' (Mezzadra, 2010; Samaddar, 2021; Papadopoulos et al., 2008; Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007). The tension field between infrastructures of control and autonomy is visualised in the figure of Almería's 'global roundabout' as the broken grid surrounding the roundabout.

Ir/regularity therefore not merely results in structural extractivism but is inevitably confronted with migrants' collective agency to challenge the boundaries of law. By means of in/formal migration industries (Schapendonk, 2018; Cranston et al., 2018; Ingold, 2011), migrants collectively challenge labour- and mobility regimes and socially navigate (Schapendonk, 2015; Vigh, 2009) their ways from place to place and job to job. In their mobility trajectories, the in/formal employment in (Almería's) agriculture is often a common thread. This tendency marks the entanglement of migrant im/mobilities and their employment in agricultural production.

By giving an empirical account of the relationality of the production of Almería's crops and labour migrants' transits, scrutinised by the model of the global roundabout, I have detected larger infrastructures that affect these im/mobilities. I distilled that the inherent entanglements of im/mobilities of people and products are produced by the implemented interplay of labour- and mobility regulations and result in a constant dialectic between regimes of control. As Almería's global roundabout revolves around a capitalist global value chain, it therefore showcases how

the different dimensions of entanglement are shaped by the omnipresent force of capitalism. I therefore argue that the entanglement of ir/regular migrant labour and Almería's agricultural production exposes the driving force of this capitalist value chain, which is the accumulation of capital. The current configuration of this system fills the Western supermarket carts with cheap tomatoes, produced by the extraction of ir/regular and in/formal migrant labour. This division articulates the coloniality of Almería's value chain and exposes the racialised lines of contemporary capitalism.

7.3. What is next: recommendations future research

Deriving from this research, I propose recommendations that could further expand and enrich the scope of this research.

Firstly, it would be interesting to extend the sites of this research beyond the region of Almería. Although the participants of this study include individuals involved in various segments of Almería's agriculture, it has focussed merely on actors situated in and around the region Almería. However, as shown, Almería's production network is globally scattered. A multi-sited approach to this research over a larger timespan would therefore be of great value. It would enable further insights into the global nature of social networks encompassing Almería's agriculture and the transnational mobility trajectories of agricultural goods and labour migrants.

Secondly, taking into account the im/mobilities of the materialities of agricultural production would amplify the scope of this research and enable further insights into the interrelationality of global im/mobilities.

This suggestion builds on the example of the *semillero*,⁹³ where seeds from all over the world are grown by a global labour force to subsequently be distributed worldwide. These tendencies could be researched from a lens of 'entanglement' to delve into global im/mobilities comprising capitalist systems of production.

Thirdly, it would be interesting to amplify the variety of participants. Although this study includes actors that experience Almería's production from different perspectives, it proved difficult to gain access to producers and larger companies within the industry. This has caused a gap in the collected data as their perspectives and motivations are of great significance to the functioning of the capitalised and globalised agri-industry. The interviews I had with farmers, seed-distributors and managers of processing plants have provided valuable information on their motivations on the recruitment of labour migrants and their relations with other actors within the agricultural production. Therefore, the perspectives of larger retailers and distributors would enrich my current data by providing further insights into macrostructural decision-making and the interrelationalities of global production networks in a capitalist era.

Fourthly, drawing on the aim to research relational structures within production networks, it would be relevant to delve deeper into the configurations of formal (transnational) recruitment infrastructures. These would entail official brokering services, intermediaries and employment agencies like *Terra Fecundis*.⁹⁴ Being attentive to the formal recruitment networks and the transitions between formal and informal employment would enable further investigation into the ambiguity of in/formality. In the context of transit labour, it would thereby be a significant variable in researching how regulatory infrastructures coincide with the circularity of

migrant labour between regions and countries. As employment agencies often arrange juridically authorised temporary labour contracts for migrant labour, it enables the mobility between Spain and migrants' country of origin. Several participants have stated to prefer working seasonally and return part-time to their countries of origin. However, the current labour and mobility regime frequently complicates this. Therefore, it would be interesting to study how temporality of residence, through seasonal contracting, would affect migrants' im/mobilities and transnational lives.

7.4. Breaking down the bureaucratic maze: recommendations future policy

This thesis has aimed to untangle the Spanish and European bureaucratic maze of labour and mobility regulations and its effects on ir/regular migrants' im/mobilities and lived realities. The emphasis on the experiences of labour migrants, being subject to current policies, has enabled me to detect significant discrepancies between policy and practice. In my thesis, I argue that the intentional production of ir/regularity is a result of the extractive forces of postcolonial capitalism. The in/formality and precarity resulting from present macrostructures of control, structurally harming human rights, makes it urgent to outline some recommendations for future policy. In this section, I will therefore suggest several policy implications that might enhance the living and working conditions of ir/regular (labour) migrants significantly while sustaining Almería's large-scale agricultural production.

⁹³ See chapter 4.1.1.

⁹⁴ As introduced in chapter 6.2.2.

The guiding principle of my recommendations is to eliminate the juridically imposed “crossroad of capitalist labour demand and deprived citizenship” and acknowledge labour migrants as an essential factor in the globalised agricultural system. This could be achieved by a radical reorganisation of Spanish- and European regularisation procedures as more legal migration routes will decrease uncontrollable and irregular migration. I therefore argue that regularisation procedures should be 1) shorter 2) more transparent and 3) centralised. I will shortly outline why and how.

Firstly, the duration of Spanish regularisation procedures should be reduced by eliminating the current three years of ‘waiting time’ to be eligible to obtain documentation. As demonstrated previously,⁹⁵ these three years of waiting force migrants into a legal limbo in which they are not allowed to work formally but need to generate a livelihood. Informality of employment structurally harms human rights. Thereby would regularisation compel migrants to pay taxes in Spain, which is financially profitable from a state perspective. Hence, it would be socially and economically beneficial for both the labour migrants involved and the Spanish state to incorporate labour migrants into the Spanish legal system.

Secondly, I strongly recommend enhancing the transparency of regularisation procedures. This can be done by making the necessary information on the course and requisites of the procedures accessible in various languages and centralising the information in one (online) space. This could undermine inefficiencies and unclarity during the course of regularisation and therefore save both time and money. From a migrants’ perspective, transparency of the procedures could clarify future prospects and therefore reduce feelings of stuckness and enhance their sense of agency.

⁹⁵ See chapter 5.

Thirdly, regularisation procedures should be more centralised. Currently, the necessary actions migrants need to execute to acquire documentation are scattered over multiple authorities. Centralising the procedure could prevent miscommunication between different parties and thus enhance the speed and transparency of the processes which, in turn, will save time and money.

Fourthly, I propose to delink the eligibility for a Spanish residence permit from the possession of a labour contract, and thus disentangle the regulatory infrastructures of labour and mobility. As shown earlier, the interplay of Spanish labour and mobility regimes has fuelled the semi-normalised commodification of labour contracts. Consequently, migrants who aspire to regularise are subject to exploitation by employers who hold the power to contract them. This type of structural extractivism should be undermined. Although the connection between Spanish residence and employment has been originally implemented to stimulate migrants’ economic contribution to Spain as their ‘host country’, capitalist forces overwhelm and abuse these intentions. Hence, migrants should also be allowed to regularise quickly, transparently and in centralised ways.

Having researched how current policies intentionally produce ir/regularity, it seems contradictory to suggest changes in these same policies. However, ever structure needs a counter movement. Therefore, this thesis aims to be part of a collective effort to break down Europe’s bureaucratic maze and decolonialise contemporary systems of capitalist production and regulatory infrastructures of control.

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Appendix I: The Bill Board

A bill board, the shiny image that is communicated to us on daily base. But what is behind a bill board?

Behind these bill boards stretches the Plastic Sea. In the heat of the sun, but in the shadows of the images we hold on to.







Appendix II: List of participants

N	Name	Role in Almería's value chain	Origin	Gender
1	Ousmane	Employed in greenhouses	Senegal	Man
2	Basima	Employed in greenhouses and distribution centres	Morocco	Woman
3	Daniel	Producer of tomatoes and watermelons in a family business	Spain	Man
4	José Manuel*	Seed-grower in <i>semillero</i> Campoejido	Spain	Man
5	Spitou Mendy*	Labour rights activist, formerly aligned with labour union SOC-SAT. Work experience in agriculture and construction and currently employed as a translator	Senegal	Man
6	Mohamed	Employed in different segments of agriculture, scattered over distinct regions in Spain and France	Mali	Man
7	Abdul*	Labour rights activist and syndicalist at labour union SOC-SAT	Morocco	Man

8	Pablo*	Producer of aubergines, courgettes and bell peppers in a family business	Spain	Man
9	Abdou	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Man
10	Antonio*	Social worker in the day centre of Almería Acoge	Spain	Man
11	Khalifa*	Labour rights activist, formerly aligned with labour union SOC-SAT	Senegal	Man
12	José Almería Acoge*	Social worker in the day centre of Almería Acoge	Spain	Man
13	José SOC-SAT*	Labour rights activist, syndicalist, leader of labour union SOC-SAT	Spain	Man
14	Omar	Employed in greenhouses	Mali	Man
15	Musa	Employed in greenhouses	Mali	Man
16	Bakary	Employed in greenhouses	Senegal	Man
17	Hadi	Unemployed	Morocco	Man
18	Nadir	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Man
19	Samir	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Man

20	Babacar	Employed in greenhouses and construction	Senegal	Man
21	Malick	Employed in greenhouses	Senegal	Man
22	Maria*	Lawyer in the day centre of Almería Acoge	Spain	Woman
23	Souleymane	Employed in greenhouses	Senegal	Man
24	Alicia*	Social worker in the day centre of Almería Acoge	Spain	Woman
25	Said	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Man
26	Andrei	Employed in greenhouses	Bulgaria	Man
27	Filip	Employed in greenhouses	Bulgaria	Man
28	Chadiah	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Woman
29	Hanifa	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Woman
30	Farah	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Woman
31	Karima	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Woman
32	Ramzi	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Man
33	Hassan	Employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Man
34	Amin	Previously employed in greenhouses	Morocco	Man

*Name is not anonymised.

Appendix III: Topic list interviews

- Introduction interview
 - Who am I
 - Aim & summary of research
 - Privacy & anonymity
 - Informed consent & permission recording
- Personal information participant
 - Name?
 - Origin?
 - Employment?
 - Time in Almeria/Spain?
 - Previous destinations/trajectory?
- Agricultural production line
 - Segments?
 - Actors?
 - Actions?
 - Relation between segments
 - Relation between actors
- Migrants' employment in agricultural industry
 - Where?
 - Why?
 - How?
 - In/formally employed?
 - Work permit / legal status?
 - Temporarily/permanently?
 - Previous employment?
- Im/mobility dynamics labour migrants
 - Where do migrants come from?
 - What routes?
 - Why?
 - Obstructions/facilitations?
 - With whom?
 - What means?
 - Experience trajectory?
 - Experience work tomato production?
 - Where preferably be/go?
- Ir/regularity
 - Current legal status?
 - Changing legal status over time?
 - Meaning of this status?
 - Influence status on mobility?
 - Influence status on employment?
 - Influence employment on status?
 - Implications [freedoms/obstructions] current status?
 - Legally ideal situation - why?
- Migration intermediaries
 - What social contacts/intermediaries?
 - Which services?
 - Relationship with intermediary?
 - Influence intermediary on mobility?
 - Influence intermediary on employment?
 - Facilitations/obstructions intermediaries?
 - Influence intermediaries on social status?

Appendix IV: Summary

Almería is a province in the south of Spain and provides the country's largest agricultural greenhouse production (Deutsche Welle, 2019; Aznar-Sanchez et al., 2014; DePablo et al., 2020). Consequently, the region's landscape appears as a 'Plastic Sea' encompassing 31.000 hectares of greenhouses. Under these whitewashed roofs, in the plenty distribution centres and in transport businesses work around 203.000 migrant labourers. This mobile workforce is fundamental to Almería's annual production of 3.5 million tons of crops (Rippingale, 2019; Deutsche Welle, 2019).

To further investigate the relationality between labour and mobility in the context of Almería's agriculture, this research aims to 1) gain empirical insights into the entanglements of the im/mobilities of ir/regular labour migrants and the im/mobilities of agricultural products comprising Almería's agricultural production and 2) unpack how these interdependent im/mobilities are shaped by regulatory infrastructures of control and in/formal migration industries to 3) detect how the tension field between mobility- facilitation and obstruction causes a constant dialectic between regimes of control and the autonomy of migration. Situating this study in an era of postcolonial capitalism, I aim to articulate the politicised lines between those who reap the fruits in Almería's greenhouses and those who reap the fruits of its capitalised production. To relate individual experiences to the analysis of larger infrastructures, I have conducted qualitative research among various actors involving Almería's agricultural industry.

Including the different perspectives of actors involved in Almería's agriculture - labour migrants, farmers, seed-growers, activists, syndicalists, social workers and a lawyer - will provide a deeper understanding into the relationships between these actors and their actions. All these actors revolve around Almería's 'global roundabout.' The 'global roundabout' is a conceptual model that I will introduce in this research to capture the mechanism that transnationally regulates the supply and demand of

agricultural labour and products. This model links up academic debates on im/mobilities and networked conceptualisations of global value chains. It subsequently demonstrates how global value chains in contemporary postcolonial capitalism are related to ir/regularity as an instrument to produce in/formal and cheap migrant labour. Elaborating on the exploitation caused by the production of ir/regularity, this research also aims to highlight the countermovements that ir/regularity provokes. From migrants' collective effort to challenge infrastructures of control, the autonomy of migration emerges. This autonomy is regained by in/formal and fluid migration industries. The 'global roundabout' connects this research' theoretical foundations to my empirical findings. As roundabouts are frequently designated as "Almería's most popular employment industries" its structure symbolises the in/formal supply and demand of labour.

In the first empirical chapter (chapter 4), I show how migrant labour is embedded in Almería's globalised agricultural industry and demonstrate how global capitalism has fueled the expansion and industrialisation of Almería's production. Focussing on the relationality between different actors demonstrates how Almería's global value chain comprises a fluid and interrelated network of social relations. This results in a globally embedded and capital-driven system of entangled im/mobilities of labour migrants and agricultural products. Subsequently, in chapter 5, I elaborate on the ways in which regulatory infrastructures produce 'ir/regularity' among labour migrants and how this affects their im/mobilities. Building on the inherent dependency between the im/mobilities of labour migrants and agricultural products, I show how labour and mobility are also entangled in the regulatory realm. These regulatory entanglements result in the production of a transitory, in/formal migrant labour force that is subject to the cost-cutting and extractivist tendencies of global, postcolonial capitalist value chains. The exploitative consequences of the regulatory entanglement of mobility- and labour regimes is marked by the extensive business in labour contracts. Beside showing how ir/regularity reinforces exploitation, I highlight how it is

inevitably confronted with migrants' collective efforts to challenge the grids of control. By means of social negotiation, fluid and in/formal migration industries emerge that facilitate alternative ways of mobilisation, and therefore reinforce the autonomy of migration. The continuous dialectic between infrastructures of control- and autonomy implies how also these infrastructures are inherently entangled in shaping labour migrants' mobility trajectories in Almería's agricultural production.

This qualitative research concludes that there are three interlinked dimensions of 'entanglement' concerning the involvement of migrant labour in Almería's agricultural industry. These entanglements are: the intrinsic dependency of im/mobilities of agricultural products and labour migrants; the interplay between labour- and mobility regimes; and the dialectic between control and autonomy. Focusing on the multiple levels of entanglement unpacks the mutual interdependencies and therefore the power dynamics that are at play on Almería's 'global roundabout'. This, in turn, helps to excavate the 'politics of mobility' that are at the foundation of Almería's agricultural production. Analysing these three layers of entanglement by means of the 'global roundabout', exposes the deeply ingrained colonial relation between capitalism and extractivism. Therefore, the contemporary regulatory configuration to supply capitalist labour demand by reinforcing ir/regularity underlines how global im/mobilities are inherently political and subject to the overarching force of postcolonial capitalism.

Appendix V: Resumen

Almería es una provincia situada en el sur de España y proporciona la mayor producción agrícola de invernaderos del país (Deutsche Welle, 2019; Aznar-Sánchez et al., 2014; DePablo et al., 2020). En consecuencia, el paisaje de la región aparece como un "mar de plástico" que abarca 31.000 hectáreas de invernaderos. Bajo estos techos blanqueados, los centros de distribución y empresas de transporte trabajan alrededor de 203.000 trabajadores inmigrantes. Esta mano de obra móvil es fundamental para la producción anual de Almería de 3,5 millones de toneladas de cultivos (Rippingale, 2019; Deutsche Welle, 2019).

Para profundizar en la relacionalidad entre mano de obra y movilidad en el contexto de la agricultura Almeriense esta investigación tiene como objetivo 1) obtener conocimientos empíricos sobre los enredos de las im/movilidades de los migrantes laborales ir/regulares y las im/movilidades de los productos agrícolas que componen la producción agrícola de Almería y 2) desempacar cómo estas im/movilidades interdependientes son moldeadas por las infraestructuras reguladoras de control y las industrias migratorias in/formales para 3) detectar cómo el campo de tensión entre la movilidad-facilitación y la obstrucción provoca una dialéctica constante entre los regímenes de control y la autonomía de la migración. Situando este estudio en una época de capitalismo poscolonial, pretendo articular las líneas politizadas entre quienes recogen los frutos en los invernaderos de Almería y quienes recogen los frutos de su producción capitalizada. Para relacionar las experiencias individuales con el análisis de infraestructuras más amplias, he llevado a cabo una investigación cualitativa entre diversos actores relacionados con la industria agrícola de Almería.

La inclusión de las diferentes perspectivas de los actores implicados en la agricultura Almeriense, a saber: migrantes laborales, agricultores, semilleros, activistas, sindicalistas, trabajadores sociales y un abogado, proporcionará una comprensión más profunda de las relaciones entre estos actores y sus acciones. Todos estos actores giran en torno a la

"rotonda global" de Almería. La "rotonda global" es un modelo conceptual que introduciré en esta investigación para captar el mecanismo que regula transnacionalmente la oferta y la demanda de mano de obra y productos agrícolas. Este modelo vincula los debates académicos sobre el "giro de las movilidades" con las conceptualizaciones en red de las cadenas de valor mundiales. Posteriormente, demuestra cómo las cadenas de valor globales en el capitalismo poscolonial contemporáneo están relacionadas con la ir/regularidad como instrumento para producir mano de obra migrante in/formal y barata. Al profundizar en la explotación causada por la producción de ir/regularidad, esta investigación también pretende destacar los contramovimientos que la ir/regularidad provoca. Del esfuerzo colectivo de los migrantes por desafiar las infraestructuras de control surge la autonomía de la migración. Esta autonomía es recuperada por las industrias de la migración in/formal y fluida. La "rotonda global" conecta los fundamentos teóricos de esta investigación con mis conclusiones empíricas. Dado que las rotondas se designan con frecuencia como "las agencias de empleo más populares de Almería", su configuración ilustra la oferta y la demanda in/formal de mano de obra.

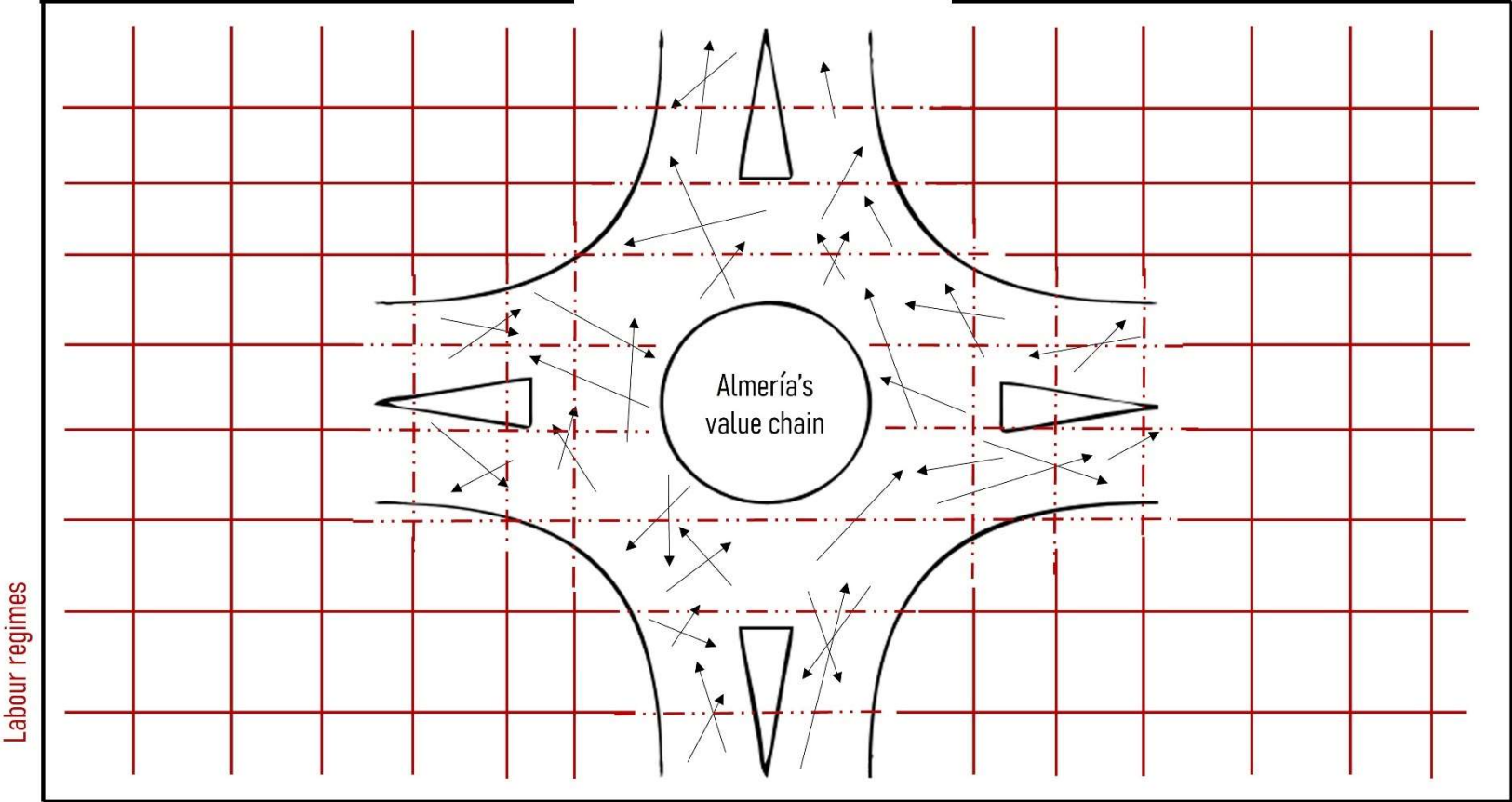
En el primer capítulo empírico muestro cómo la mano de obra migrante está integrada en la industria agrícola globalizada de Almería y demuestro cómo el capitalismo global ha impulsado la expansión e industrialización de la producción almeriense. Al centrarse en la relación entre los distintos actores, se demuestra cómo la cadena de valor global de Almería comprende una red fluida e interrelacionada de relaciones sociales. Esto da lugar a un sistema globalmente arraigado e impulsado por el capital de im/movilidades enredadas de migrantes laborales y productos agrícolas. A continuación, me explayaré sobre las formas en que las infraestructuras reguladoras producen "ir/regularidad" entre los trabajadores migrantes y cómo esto afecta a sus im/movilidades. Partiendo de la dependencia inherente entre las im/movilidades de los trabajadores migrantes y los productos agrícolas, muestro cómo la mano de obra y la movilidad también están enredadas en el ámbito normativo. Estos enredos normativos dan lugar a la producción de una mano de obra migrante

transitoria e in/formal que está sujeta a las tendencias de recorte de costes y extractivismo de las cadenas de valor capitalistas integradas a nivel mundial. Además de mostrar cómo la ir/regularidad refuerza la explotación, también destacó cómo se enfrenta inevitablemente a los esfuerzos colectivos de los migrantes para desafiar las redes de control. Mediante la negociación social, surgen industrias migratorias fluidas e in/formales que facilitan formas alternativas de movilización y, por tanto, refuerzan la autonomía de la migración. La continua dialéctica entre infraestructuras de control y autonomía implica cómo también estas infraestructuras están intrínsecamente enredadas en la configuración de las trayectorias de movilidad de los migrantes laborales en la producción agrícola de Almería.

Esta investigación cualitativa concluyó que existen tres dimensiones de "enredo" interconectadas en relación con la participación de la mano de obra migrante en la industria agrícola de Almería. Estos enredos son: la dependencia intrínseca de la im/movilidad de los productos agrícolas y la mano de obra migrante; la interacción entre los regímenes de trabajo y movilidad; y la dialéctica entre el control y la autonomía. Al centrarnos en los múltiples niveles de enredo, descubrimos las interdependencias mutuas y, por tanto, las dinámicas de poder que están en juego en la "rotonda global" de Almería. Esto, a su vez, ayuda a desenterrar las "políticas de movilidad" que están en la base de la producción agrícola de Almería. El análisis de estas tres capas de enredo por medio de la "rotonda global", expone la relación colonial profundamente arraigada entre el capitalismo y el extractivismo. Por lo tanto, la configuración normativa contemporánea para abastecer la demanda de mano de obra capitalista reforzando la ir/regularidad subraya cómo las im/movilidades globales son inherentemente políticas y están sujetas a la fuerza dominante del capitalismo poscolonial.

Appendix VI: The Global Roundabout





Postcolonial capitalism



Labour regimes

Mobility regimes

Legend

-  Im/mobilities of labour migrants and
-  Entanglement of
-  Grids of control
-  Autonomy of migration